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# Public Administration Singapore-Style

Jon S. T. Quah



**PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
SINGAPORE-STYLE**

# RESEARCH IN PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS AND MANAGEMENT

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RESEARCH IN PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS AND  
MANAGEMENT VOLUME 19

**PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION  
SINGAPORE-STYLE**

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ACAC	Anti-Corruption Advisory Committee
ACB	Anti-Corruption Branch
ACRC	Anti-Corruption Review Committee (Singapore) Anti-Corruption Civil Rights Commission (South Korea)
AEB	Adult Education Board
ASTAR	Agency for Science, Technology and Research
AWI	Annual Wage Increase
AWS	Annual Wage Supplement
BCC	Board of Commissioners of the Currency
BCCS	Board of Commissioners of the Currency, Singapore
BFR	Budgeting for Results
BMA	British Military Administration
BVBAS	Block Vote Budget Allocation System
CAAS	Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation (India)
CCAC	Commission Against Corruption (Macao SAR)
CEC	Corruption Eradication Commission (Indonesia)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEP	Currently Estimated Potential
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CLTPO	Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Ordinance
CPF	Central Provident Fund
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
CPIB	Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau
CRA	Casino Regulatory Authority
CSSP	Community Safety and Security Program
CWP	Cut Waste Panel
EDB	Economic Development Board
EMA	Energy Market Authority
ESC	Education Service Commission
GDP	Gross domestic product
GRC	Group Representation Constituency
HDB	Housing and Development Board

ICAC	Independent Commission Against Corruption (Hong Kong SAR)
IES	International Enterprise Singapore
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies
IRAS	Internal Revenue Authority of Singapore
ISA	Internal Security Act
ISD	Internal Security Department
ITB	Industrial Training Board
JI	<i>Jemaah Islamiyah</i>
JTC	Jurong Town Corporation
KAL	Key Appointment Likelihood
KICAC	Korea Independent Commission Against Corruption (South Korea)
LIBS	Line-Item Budgeting System
LTA	Land Transport Authority
MAS	Monetary Authority of Singapore
MP	Member of Parliament
MPA	Maritime and Port Authority
MSD	Management Services Department
MVC	Monthly Variable Component
NCCC	National Counter Corruption Commission (Thailand)
NEA	National Environmental Agency
NPAA	Non-Pensionable Annual Allowance
NPP	Neighborhood Police Post
NPPA	Newspaper and Printing Presses Act
NWC	National Wages Council
OASIS	On-line Applications System for Integrated Services
PA	People's Association
PAB	Personnel Administration Branch
PAP	People's Action Party
PCDSC	Police and Civil Defense Services Commission
PCGG	Presidential Commission on Good Government
PERC	Political Economic Risk Consultancy
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PMSC	Personnel Management Steering Committee
POCA	Prevention of Corruption Act
POCO	Prevention of Corruption Ordinance
POSB	Post Office Savings Bank
PPBS	Program and Performance Budgeting System
PPSO	Preservation of Public Security Ordinance

PRE	Potential Ranking Exercise
PSA	Port of Singapore Authority
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSD	Public Service Division
PSL	Public Service Leadership
PS21	Public Service for the 21st Century
PUB	Public Utilities Board
QCC	Quality Control Circles
QSM	Quality Service Managers
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SCR	Staff Confidential Report
SCS	Singapore Civil Service
SDC	Sentosa Development Corporation
SDR	Staff Development Report
SHB	Singapore Harbor Board
SIT	Singapore Improvement Trust
SIU	Service Improvement Unit
SMC	Single Member Constituency
SPF	Singapore Police Force
SPRING	Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board
SSC	Singapore Sports Council
SSCS	Straits Settlements Civil Service
SSS	Staff Suggestion Scheme
STB	Singapore Telephone Board Singapore Tourist Board
STPB	Singapore Tourist Promotion Board
TAS	Telecommunication Authority of Singapore
TDB	Trade Development Board
TPDB	Tanjong Pagar Dock Board
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
URA	Urban Redevelopment Authority
URD	Urban Renewal Department
VITB	Vocational and Industrial Training Board
WIT	Work Improvement Team



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Jon S.T. Quah, Ph.D.*, was professor of Political Science at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and co-editor of the *Asian Journal of Political Science* until his retirement in June 2007 after 35 years of service. Now he is a consultant on anti-corruption strategies, civil service reform, and policy analysis in Asian countries. He was Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at NUS (July 1990–June 1991), Head of the Department of Political Science (1992–1998), and Coordinator of the European Studies Program (1990–1998). His visiting appointments include: the East-West Center in Honolulu; the Harvard-Yenching Institute and Harvard Institute of International Development; the Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California at Berkeley; the Stanford Program in International Legal Studies and the Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University; and the National Center for Development Studies, Australian National University. He has published widely on anti-corruption strategies and civil service reform in Asian countries, and on public administration in Singapore. He is the author of *Curbing Corruption in Asia: A Comparative Study of Six Countries* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003) and *Combating Corruption Singapore-Style: Lessons for Other Asian Countries* (Baltimore: School of Law, University of Maryland, 2007). Details of his other publications are available from <http://www.jonstquah.com>.



# PREFACE

My interest in public administration as a discipline was sparked by Dr Joseph P.L. Jiang, who was a student of the late Professor Fred W. Riggs at Indiana University, in 1968 when I took his course in public administration during my final year at the Department of Political Science, University of Singapore. I also remember fondly my first meeting with Professor Riggs during the same year when he gave a guest lecture in Dr Jiang's course (Quah, 2008d). I met Fred again many years later at various international conferences but I remember fondly our meetings in Chiangmai in June 1993 and in Honolulu in June 1996. I have also remained in touch with Dr Jiang after his return to Taipei.

To pursue my interest in public administration, I decided to conduct a comparative study on the public service commissions in four Asian countries for my M.Soc.Sc. thesis in political science at the University of Singapore (Quah, 1971). I was fortunate to have Dr David S. Gibbons as the supervisor for my thesis as I learnt a great deal from him not only in the classroom but also from my lengthy discussions with him on my draft chapters. I value greatly the detailed and constructive feedback I received from David on my research papers and draft thesis chapters. Above all, David instilled in me the need for detailed documentation for the arguments in my research papers and thesis.

At the Department of Government at the Florida State University (FSU), where I was a Fulbright scholar from August 1970 to May 1972, my interest and training in public administration were further enhanced by Professors Malcolm B. Parsons, Richard Chackerian, and Odell Waldby. Professor Parsons introduced me to the fascinating field of comparative public administration through his excellent seminars on public bureaucracies. Malcolm shared with me his extensive knowledge of United States' technical assistance programs in Southeast Asia and public administration in the Philippines (Parsons, 1957, 1962).

The late Professor Parsons chaired my doctoral dissertation committee and was a wonderful and caring mentor. As I had to return to Singapore on the completion of my coursework in June 1972 to conduct fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation on the Housing and Development Board, I would

submit the draft chapters of my dissertation to him by air mail (there was no email then) from Singapore to Tallahassee. After reading my draft chapters, he would circulate them to the other members of my dissertation committee for their views. He would then collate all their comments and send their collective feedback to me. He was also most supportive during the defense of my dissertation at FSU in May 1975.

Professor Chackerian was responsible for nurturing my interest in administrative theory and public budgeting. Professor Waldby taught me all that I know about public personnel administration. Professor Robert E. Mitchell from the Social Science Research Center at FSU, who was also a member of my doctoral dissertation committee, provided detailed and constructive critiques of my draft dissertation chapters and shared his vast knowledge of public housing programs around the world with me (Mitchell, 1970).

I would like to acknowledge my intellectual debt to the late Professor Donald P. Warwick, who was a Fellow at the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID). I first met Don during my first sabbatical leave as a Harvard-Yenching Fellow at Harvard University from September 1979 to May 1980. My interest in policy implementation can be attributed to Don as he kindly allowed me to audit his graduate seminar on this topic at Harvard. In 1985, we jointly taught an honors seminar course on public policy when he was a Visiting Professor at the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore (NUS). I learnt a great deal about public bureaucracy and policy implementation from my discussions with him and his books on these topics (Warwick, Meade, & Reed, 1975; Warwick, 1982). I will always remember Don for his kindness and assistance during my two subsequent sabbatical stints at the HIID from August 1993 to March 1994 and at the Harvard-Yenching Institute from July to September 1997.

I am also indebted to the late Professor Martin Landau of the University of California at Berkeley for enriching my knowledge of public bureaucracy during my sabbatical leave at the Institute of Governmental Studies from September 1986 to June 1987. I found his theory of redundancy very useful for analyzing Singapore politics (Landau, 1969; Quah, 1989b).

Professor Thomas J. Bellows of the University of Texas at San Antonio is a good friend who has shared his extensive knowledge on the People's Action Party (PAP) and Singapore's politics with me during the past 35 years. Tom pioneered the study of the PAP in Singapore with his 1968 doctoral dissertation for Yale University and his 1970 monograph (Bellows, 1968, 1970). I have learnt a great deal from Tom's work on the PAP and his more recent research on Singapore's politics and bureaucracy.<sup>1</sup>

I am grateful to Professor Gerald E. Caiden of the University of Southern California whose work on administrative reform and bureaucratic corruption has influenced greatly my research on these topics.<sup>2</sup> I have known Gerald since 1981 and am very grateful for his friendship and intellectual support during the past 28 years.

Professor Krishna K. Tummala of Kansas State University invited me in 1982 (on the recommendation of Professor Caiden) to contribute the chapter on Singapore for his edited volume on *Administrative Systems Abroad* (Quah, 1982b). Since then we have collaborated on many projects and I would like to thank him for his friendship and for sharing his knowledge on public administration in India with me (Quah, 2003; Tummala, 1994).

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my gratitude to two important persons during my formative years. My late aunt, Queenie Quah Quee Tin, was responsible for instilling in me the love for reading and writing during my early years in school. I am also grateful to my pre-university General Paper teacher, Newlyn de Rozario, for encouraging me to read political science at the University of Singapore.

I have many friends in the Singapore Civil Service whose knowledge and insights have certainly enhanced my understanding of public administration in Singapore. I would like to thank in particular Tan Boon Huat, Dr K. Ismail Sudderudin, David Ma, Teo Hee Lian, Teo Hong Guan, Jarmal Singh, Charlotte Beck, Basskaran Nair, Soh Kee Hean, Lim Hock Chuan, Vijakumar Sethuraj, Toh Yong Chuan, and Anthony Tan. However, none of them should be held responsible for the views expressed in this book.

I am grateful to the many students who were enrolled in the various public administration modules taught by me during my 35 years at the Department of Political Science, University of Singapore (July 1972–June 1980) and NUS (July 1980–June 2007) for their useful feedback on my lectures and seminars. I taught PS2244 Public Administration in Singapore from August to November 2005 and from January to May 2007. I was also responsible for teaching PS4211 Public Policy and Governance in Singapore for many years. The chapters in this book are based on the PS2244 lectures and PS4211 seminars I presented at NUS. I wish to record my appreciation to my former students for rendering valuable research assistance for my various research projects: Ms Wong Mei Kwong, Mr Tan Yew Hock, Mr Lum Moe Sing, Mr Yeo Siak Ling, Mr Paul Lim, Mr Chan Jen Wu, Ms Woo Su Yun, and Mr Jonathan Chong. I would also like to thank Professor Kau Ah Keng of the NUS Entrepreneurship Center for inviting me to give the lecture on “Public Sector Management in Singapore” to

university students from many countries attending the annual NUS Summer Program in July from 2007 to 2009.

I have benefited a great deal from the constructive feedback I have received from many colleagues and good friends on the papers I presented on various aspects on public administration in Singapore at many international conferences. In particular I would like to thank the following for their help: John P. Burns (University of Hong Kong); Ian Scott (Murdoch University); Michael Johnston (Colgate University); Larry Diamond (Stanford University); Donald Emmerson (Stanford University); Jose Edgardo Campos (World Bank); Peter Larmour (Australian National University); Robert Gregory (Victoria University of Wellington); Ian Thynne (Charles Darwin University), Leslie Palmier (University of Bath); Rino Schiavo-Campo (World Bank); Robert P. Beschel Jr (World Bank); Barbara Nunberg (World Bank); John Middleton (East-West Center); In-Joung Whang (Korea Development Institute); Amara Raksasataya (Asian and Pacific Development Administration Center); Heinrich Siedentopf (Post-Graduate School of Administrative Sciences, Speyer); Itoko Suzuki (United Nations Development Administration Division); Jong S. Jun (California State University East Bay); Minoru Ouchi (Shumei University); Raul P. de Guzman (University of the Philippines); Christopher Hood (Oxford University); B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh); Jak Jabes (Asian Development Bank); Akira Nakamura (Meiji University); Anthony B.L. Cheung (Hong Kong Institute of Education); Pan Suk Kim (Yonsei University); Heungsuk Choi (Korea University); Bidhya Bowornwathana (Chulalongkorn University); Milan Tun-Wen Sun (National Chi Nan University); Likhit Dhiravegin (Thammasat University); Shalendra D. Sharma (University of San Francisco); Leo Suryadinata (Nanyang Technological University); Tan Chwee Huat (NUS); Mukul Asher (NUS); David S. Jones (University of Brunei); M. Shamsul Haque (NUS); and Yuzo Yabuno (Kyushu University).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Clay Wescott (Asia Pacific Governance Institute) for suggesting that I publish this book with the Emerald Group Publishing. I am also very grateful to Lawrence R. Jones, Series Editor of Research in Public Policy Analysis and Management (RPPAM), for agreeing to publish this book as Volume 19 of RPPAM, and for his insightful comments on all the chapters. Both Clay and Larry have been most supportive of my research on governance in Singapore and other Asian countries. I am also very grateful to Mary Miskin, Assistant Commissioning Editor, Emerald Group Publishing, for her kind and professional assistance in facilitating the publication of this book.

The NUS Central Library has the best collection on public administration in Singapore. I have benefited a great deal from its vast resources and am grateful to my sister, Jill Quah, who was the University Librarian from 1994 to 2002, and to Mr Tim Yap Fuan, Principal Librarian, for their advice and assistance in locating relevant sources for my research during my 35 years at NUS and after my retirement in June 2007.

Last, but not least, I would like to place on record my greatest debt to my wife and best friend, Stella R. Quah, former Professor of Sociology at NUS, for her intellectual and moral support for all my research and professional activities during the past 38 years of our marriage. She is the first person to read whatever I have written and I have benefited tremendously from her wise and constructive feedback on my research. I would also like to take this opportunity to remember my two late grandfathers, Quah Hong Chiam and Chew Hean Swee, for their courage and foresight in leaving their native Fujian Province in China for Singapore. Quah Hong Chiam's most important legacy was the education fund he set up for all his grandchildren which enabled them to pursue their university education in Singapore. Chew Hean Swee played an active role in the anti-Japanese resistance during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. I am dedicating this book to Stella and to the memory of my two late grandfathers as a small token of my appreciation to them.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Bellows (1989, 1993, 2009).
2. See Caiden (1969, 1991), Caiden and Caiden (1977), and Caiden (1988, 1997, 2001).

Jon S.T. Quah  
Singapore,  
December 2009



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

We live in an administrative age. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the goods we buy, the streets and highways on which we travel, the automobiles in which we ride, and the many services we enjoy – education, medical care, entertainment, recreation, protection of our lives and property, and many others – are made possible by administration.

– Corson and Harris (1963, p. 1)

### 1.1. SINGAPORE’S SUCCESS

In 1983, Charles T. Goodsell reviewed the depictions of bureaucracy in popular culture and academic writing in the United States and concluded that bureaucracy was viewed as “a hate object.” He wrote:

Bureaucracy, then, is despised and disparaged. It is attacked in the press, popular magazines, and best sellers. It is denounced by the political right and left. It is assaulted by molders of culture and professors of academia. It is castigated by economists, sociologists, policy analysts, political scientists, organization theorists, and social psychologists. It is charged with a wide array of crimes, which we have grouped under failure to perform; abuse of political power; and repression of employees, clients, and people in general. In short, bureaucracy stands as a splendid hate object. (Goodsell, 1983, p. 11)

However, 14 years later, in his speech at the 58th National Conference of the American Society for Public Administration in Philadelphia on 28 July 1997, Nobel Laureate Herbert A. Simon stressed that “it is time to stop defaming the public service” as organizations are the “most effective tools we humans have found for meeting human needs” (Simon, 1998, p. ii). In doing so, he was reaffirming what the German sociologist Max Weber had advocated many years ago. Weber had argued that bureaucracy was technically the most efficient form of organization possible thus:

Experience tends universally to show that the purely bureaucratic type of administrative organization – that is, the monocratic variety of bureaucracy – is, from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human

beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for heads of organization and for those acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations, and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks. (Weber, 1947, p. 337)

An important feature of contemporary society is the prevalence and omnipresence of government in the daily lives of the citizens in countries around the world. The government not only regulates the behavior of its citizens, but also extracts the necessary resources for development and distributes goods and services in a manner acceptable to society at large (Tsurutani, 1973, pp. 40–70). It plays an important role in national development by relying on the public bureaucracy to formulate and implement development programs.

The government's central role in promoting developmental goals together with the public sector's wide scope serve to underscore the importance of the public bureaucracy in the developing countries in Asia and Africa (Diamant, 1971, p. 524). In 1887, Woodrow Wilson indicated that the "object of administrative study [is] to discover, first, what the government can properly and successfully do, and, secondly, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and at the least possible cost either of money or of energy" (Wilson, 1887, p. 197).

In his book, *Flight Capital: The Alarming Exodus of America's Best and Brightest*, David Heenan describes Singapore as "a home to the world." According to him,

Modern Singapore, home to 4.3 million people, is a model of efficiency. It is envied for its prosperity, cleanliness, social order, great shopping, and world-class dining. Asia's Mr Clean is the kind of place anyone would want to live in – in other words, a home to the world . . . Rules are predictable, and government officials are helpful, if somewhat officious. Simply stated, Singapore works. (Heenan, 2005, pp. 120–121)

Heenan's praise of Singapore's efficiency is not surprising as Singapore has been ranked first for the competence of its public officials from 1999 to 2003 by *The Global Competitiveness Report*. It was ranked first among 59 countries in 1999 and 2000 (Schwab, Porter, Sachs, Warner, & Levinson, 1999, p. 242; Porter et al., 2000, p. 238). Similarly, Singapore's civil servants came up top among their counterparts in 75 countries in 2001–2002 and 80 countries in 2002–2003 (Schwab, Porter, Sachs, Cornelius, & McArthur, 2002, p. 399; Cornelius, 2003, p. 604).

The effectiveness of Singapore's government has also been confirmed by Singapore's consistently high ranking on the World Bank's governance indicator on government effectiveness which is defined as "the quality of

public service provision, the quality of the bureaucracy, the competence of civil servants, the independence of the civil service from political pressures, and the credibility of the government's commitment to policies" (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2004, p. 3). According to the World Bank, government effectiveness in Singapore is very high from 1996 to 2008 and ranges from 98.1-percentile rank in 2002 to 100 percentile rank in 1998, 2000, 2007, and 2008.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2. AIM OF THE BOOK

In the second volume of his memoirs, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew describes how Singapore has been transformed from a third world country in 1965 to a first world country in 2000. However, there is no discussion of public administration in Singapore in his book except for Chapter 12 on "Keeping the Government Clean," which deals with the various measures introduced by the People's Action Party (PAP) government to curb corruption (Lee, 2000b). Edgar Schein's study focuses on the organizational culture of the Economic Development Board (EDB) but does not include a detailed treatment of the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) (Schein, 1996).

Many scholars have written on various aspects of the SCS and public administration in Singapore. Seah Chee Meow's doctoral thesis provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of SCS from its origins in 1819 to 1970 (Seah, 1971). Lee Boon Hiok's study of the SCS focuses on the attitudes towards time of 622 Division I and II civil servants in early 1972 (Lee, 1976). More recent analyses of public administration in Singapore have been provided by Thomas J. Bellows (1985, 1989), M. Shamsul Haque (2004), Ho Khai Leong (2003), David S. Jones (1999, 1998a, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2007), Gillian Koh (1995, 1997, 1998), Lee (1980, 1989), Neo and Chen (2007), Jon S.T. Quah (1984a, 1987, 1991c, 1996b, 2003, 2007a, 2008c, 2009d), Seah (1976, 1985, 1999), and Ross Worthington (2003). However, there is so far no comprehensive study of the SCS and its role in the attainment of national development goals. This book attempts to rectify this research gap in the literature by focusing on the SCS and the statutory boards and explaining why both are effective.

What is public administration? Jay M. Shafritz and E.W. Russell have classified 18 definitions of public administration according to these four categories: political, legal, managerial, and occupational (Shafritz & Russell, 2000, pp. 5–31). However, following Dwight Waldo, public administration can be defined as a discipline or an activity.<sup>2</sup> As a discipline, public

administration is a sub-field of political science, the other sub-fields being political theory, public law and judicial behavior, comparative government and politics, political processes and behavior, and international relations and politics (Haas & Kariel, 1970, pp. 8–13). Shafritz and Russell have defined public administration as an activity as “the totality of the working day activities of all the world’s bureaucrats – whether they are legal or illegal, competent or incompetent, decent or despicable” (Shafritz & Russell, 2000, p. 7). For this book, public administration is defined as those activities undertaken by public organizations in a country to ensure the attainment of national development goals (Quah, 1981, p. 1).

How does public administration differ from private administration? First, in terms of organizational goal, unlike profit-oriented private organizations, public organizations are not motivated by profit and provide services not offered by the private sector. Second, public organizations are more closely scrutinized by the public than private organizations as they are responsible for implementing public policies. Third, the close public scrutiny of public bureaucrats and the need for them to justify and account for their actions have contributed to the prevalence of red tape in public organizations. In contrast, a major reason responsible for the efficiency of private organizations is the concern with cutting red tape. Finally, as public organizations are not profit-oriented, profit is not used as a criterion for measuring their success or failure. Consequently, it is more difficult to motivate and evaluate the performance of civil servants than employees of private organizations that can rely on various financial incentives to do so.<sup>3</sup> The four differences between public administration and private administration are summarized in Table 1.1.

The purpose of this book is to provide a detailed analysis of the nature of public administration in Singapore by focusing on the activities undertaken by the SCS and the statutory boards for the attainment of national development goals in Singapore. However, government-linked companies

**Table 1.1.** Differences between Public and Private Administration.

Criterion	Public Administration	Private Administration
Organizational Goal	Provide services not done by private sector	Profit maximization
Public Scrutiny	High	Low
Red Tape	High degree of red tape reduces efficiency	Efficiency is maximized by cutting red tape
Motivation and Evaluation	Difficult to measure performance	Reliance on financial incentives

like the Development Bank of Singapore and Singapore Airlines are not discussed in this book, because they are operated like private companies and are not part of the public bureaucracy.<sup>4</sup> Before proceeding further, it is necessary to provide an overview of the major features of public administration Singapore-style.

### 1.3. MAJOR FEATURES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SINGAPORE-STYLE

Public administration Singapore-style is characterized by the following eight features.

#### 1. Macho-meritocracy

The British colonial government introduced meritocracy in Singapore in January 1951 when the Public Service Commission (PSC) was created to accelerate the SCS's localization and to ensure that recruitment and promotion in the SCS was based on merit and not patronage. Meritocracy was introduced in the United Kingdom with the acceptance of the 1854 Northcote–Trevelyan Report's recommendation that entrance to the civil service should be based on merit in the form of competitive public examinations, which resulted in the establishment of the Civil Service Commission in 1855. Peter Hennessy has described the Northcote–Trevelyan Report as “a charter for meritocracy” as it removed from Whitehall “patronage, inefficiency and narrow departmentalism in one go” (Hennessy, 1990, p. 42).

Thus, “meritocracy” usually refers to the selection of civil servants on the basis of merit or achievement criteria. However, in Singapore, meritocracy has a broader meaning as it includes the selection of both civil servants and politicians on the basis of achievement criteria.<sup>5</sup> Ezra F. Vogel has coined the phrase “macho-meritocracy” to describe the special type of meritocracy in Singapore. According to him:

In Singapore, the small group of leaders who won power in 1959 – Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee, and Toh Chin Chye – had all distinguished themselves in Singapore or the Peninsula and won competitive scholarships to study in England. They were regarded as among the brightest of their generation, and they believed in meritocracy not only for bureaucrats but also for politicians ... In Singapore, meritocracy is more than a procedure for selecting talent. It creates an aura of special awe for the top leaders and provides a basis for discrediting less meritocratic opposition almost regardless of the content of its arguments. This special awe enabled the first generation of meritocratic, impeccably honest heroes to establish what might be called a ‘macho-meritocracy.’ (Vogel, 1989, p. 1053)

## 2. Competing with the private sector for the best talent

As Singapore has no natural resources, its human resources are its most important resource. However, with only a population of 4.98 million, of which 3.73 million are residents in June 2009, the SCS and the statutory boards have to compete with the private sector for the “best and brightest” Singaporeans by relying on three measures. First, the PSC offers undergraduate scholarships to the best students in each cohort of school-leavers in Singapore. After graduation, these “scholars” are required to serve the SCS for a fixed number of years, depending on the duration of their scholarships. In September 1981, Lee Kuan Yew attributed Singapore’s spectacular development to the fact that “our best minds have been put in charge of our most crucial problems” (Lee, 1981, p. 2). Similarly, Edgar Schein has identified the recruitment of the “best and brightest” citizens in government as one of the major strengths of Singapore because “they are potentially the most able to invent what the country needs to survive and grow and to overcome the kinds of biases and blind spots” (Schein, 1996, pp. 221–222).

Second, to prevent the brain drain of talented civil servants to the private sector, public sector salaries were increased from that in 1972, with the introduction of the 13th month allowance and subsequent salary increases from those in 1973, 1979, 1982, 1989, and 1994. Salaries of senior civil servants and ministers were benchmarked to the top earners in six private sector professionals from 1995.<sup>6</sup>

Third, in addition to providing competitive pay to retain high-flyers in the SCS, the pace of promotion in the Administrative Service was accelerated in 1989 together with the salary revision because “promotions are a much more selective and discriminating method to reward good officers than pay alone” (Lee, 1989b, p. 12). As the slow pace of promotion in the Administrative Service led to the resignation of many administrative officers, officers were promoted to their final ranks by the age of 45 instead of 50 years.

## 3. Low level of corruption

Corruption was a serious problem in Singapore during the British colonial period, especially during and after the Japanese Occupation (1942–1945). The PAP government dealt with the problem of corruption after assuming office in June 1959 by enacting the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) in June 1960, which empowered the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) to enforce the POCA impartially. The CPIB’s effectiveness in curbing corruption is reflected in the fact that Singapore is perceived to be the least corrupted Asian country from 1995 to 2009 according to

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Thus, corruption is no longer a serious problem in contemporary Singapore because it is viewed as a "high risk, low reward" activity (Quah, 2009b).

#### 4. Reliance on institutional and attitudinal administrative reforms

When the PAP government assumed office in June 1959, it inherited, *inter alia*, a civil service that was not geared for national development and civil servants with a "colonial mentality." Accordingly, the PAP government created two new ministries – the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of National Development – and the Housing and Development Board (HDB) in 1960 to solve the housing shortage. The Political Study Center was formed in August 1959 to change the mindset of the senior civil servants by requiring them to attend evening lectures on the problems facing Singapore by the political leaders so that they could contribute to the attainment of national development goals.

Singapore has succeeded in implementing administrative reforms because of the PAP government's strong support for the reforms, the clear statement of the reform objectives, focus on institutional and attitudinal reforms, reliance on both comprehensive and incremental strategies in administrative reform, and the absence of obstacles to administrative reforms.

#### 5. Reliance on statutory boards for implementing socio-economic development programs

As the SCS was devoted to perform the "housekeeping" functions of maintaining law and order, tax collection, and the provision of services during the colonial period, it did not contribute to national development. Faced with the twin problems of a serious housing shortage and a growing unemployment problem, the PAP government created two statutory boards to tackle these problems as the SCS had not been able to do so. The HDB was formed in February 1960 to implement the low-cost public housing program and the EDB was established in August 1961 to attract foreign investment to Singapore. The HDB's success in solving the housing shortage and the EDB's effectiveness in attracting foreign investment has led to the proliferation of 63 statutory boards in Singapore today.

#### 6. Effective policy implementation

Unlike other developing countries, Singapore has been effective in implementing public policies because of the support of the political leaders, the effectiveness of the SCS and statutory boards, the reliance on meritocracy to recruit and promote civil servants, its low level of corruption,

the strict disciplinary control in the SCS, the reliance on computerization and information technology since 1981, and the advantages of Singapore's small size (Quah, 1987, pp. 90–91).

#### 7. Improving service to the public

As the *raison d'être* of the SCS is to provide service to the citizens swiftly, fairly, and without discrimination to anyone, the PAP government has introduced various measures to improve the service provided to the public. During the British colonial period, the English-educated civil servants discriminated against those members of the public who could not speak English. To resolve this problem, the Central Complaints Bureau was formed in 1960 to enable the public, especially those who were not English-educated, to voice their complaints against rude and incompetent civil servants.

The 12.6 percent decline in votes for the PAP in the December 1984 general election led to the establishment of the Feedback Unit in March 1985 as the electorate had expressed their desire for more opposition and more channels to voice their complaints. In April 1991, the Service Improvement Unit was created to reduce red tape and improve service in the SCS and statutory boards through the appointment of quality service managers, who are senior civil servants, to deal with complaints from the public. In May 1995, Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21) was introduced to enhance the quality of service in the SCS and statutory boards and to prepare civil servants to welcome and accept change.

#### 8. Using policy diffusion to solve problems

When the SCS and statutory boards face a new problem, they do not “reinvent the wheel” as this is an expensive process. Rather, they rely on policy diffusion, i.e., finding out how other countries have dealt with the same problem to identify the most appropriate solution for this problem in Singapore. The selected solution is adapted to suit the context of Singapore. For example, the design of Changi Airport is based on Schipol Airport in Amsterdam, which was selected by the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) after a survey of the best and worst airports in the world. As Schipol Airport was the best airport in the world in the late 1970s, the CAAS used it as the prototype for building Changi Airport and added improvements such as carpeting and other facilities for the customers.

However, if other countries have not dealt with the problem, Singapore's civil servants will formulate new solutions. For example, to deal with the problem of traffic congestion, electronic road pricing (ERP) was introduced

to reduce traffic congestion in the central business district during the peak periods. Another example is the invention of thermal imaging scanners by the Defense Science and Technology Agency to detect fever among arriving passengers at the various ports of entry during the 2003 SARS epidemic in Singapore.

## 1.4. THE SINGAPORE CIVIL SERVICE

The SCS consists of the Prime Minister's Office and 14 ministries as indicated in [Box 1.1](#).

[Table 1.2](#) shows that the size of the SCS has grown by 2.4 times from 28,253 civil servants in June 1959 to 67,814 civil servants in December 2008. The number of civil servants has decreased by 9,607 from 69,630 in 1985 to 60,023 in 1995. Since then, the size of the SCS has risen to 67,814 civil servants in 2008. The most notable change in the SCS during 1985–2008 is the tremendous growth in the number of Division I officers from 10,158 (14.6 percent) in 1985 to 35,359 (52.1 percent) in 2008. Conversely, the decline in the number of Divisions II and III civil servants can be attributed to the corporatization of the government hospitals, which meant that nurses

### **Box 1.1.** The Singapore Civil Service

Prime Minister's Office  
Ministry of Community Development, Youth, and Sports  
Ministry of Defense  
Ministry of Education  
Ministry of Environment  
Ministry of Finance  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Health  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
Ministry of Information, Communications, and Arts  
Ministry of Law  
Ministry of Manpower  
Ministry of National Development  
Ministry of Trade and Industry  
Ministry of Transport

**Table 1.2.** Growth of the Singapore Civil Service by Division (1985–2008).

Division	1985 (a)	1990	1995	2000	2008 (b)	Change (b–a)
I	10,158 (14.6%)	12,348 (19.5%)	16,952 (28.2%)	24,400 (38.5%)	35,359 (52.1%)	+25,201
II	22,915 (32.9%)	21,095 (33.2%)	18,249 (30.4%)	18,939 (29.8%)	19,098 (28.2%)	–3,817
III	22,369 (32.1%)	20,150 (31.8%)	17,941 (29.9%)	14,993 (23.7%)	9,536 (14.1%)	–12,833
IV	14,188 (20.4%)	9,799 (15.5%)	6,881 (11.5%)	4,984 (8.0%)	3,821 (5.6%)	–10,367
Total	69,630 (100%)	63,392 (100%)	60,023 (100%)	63,316 (100%)	67,814 (100%)	–1,816

Sources: Compiled from Department of Statistics (1996, p. 44) and Department of Statistics (2009, p. 52).

and other hospital staff are no longer considered as civil servants. Similarly, the substantial reduction in number of Division IV civil servants from 14,188 (20.4 percent) to 3,821 (5.6 percent) from 1985 to 2008 is the result of outsourcing functions like garbage collection to private companies.

The size of the SCS is an important factor influencing the nature of public administration in Singapore as, other things being equal, it is easier to implement reforms in the SCS, which is much smaller than the larger civil services in other Asian countries like China, India, or Indonesia.

Apart from its four divisions, the SCS has two types of employees: those belonging to the departmental services and to the non-departmental or general services. Thus, civil servants in the first category are attached to a department of a ministry, while their non-departmental counterparts are usually based at the ministerial headquarters or temporarily attached or seconded to a department or a ministry. For the general services, Division I officers make up the Administrative Service, which had 184 officers in 2006 in senior policy-making and administrative positions (Neo & Chen, 2007, p. 333). Division II grades are occupied by executive officers with varying levels of seniority, while Division III grades consist of clerical and technical officers. Division IV grades are manual workers, office attendants, cooks, and drivers.

Division I grades in the departmental and non-departmental services can be divided into superscale and timescale. Examples of superscale officers in the Administrative Service are the permanent secretaries and deputy

**Table 1.3.** Singapore Administrative Service's Designations and Grade Structure.

Higher Rank Designations	Grade (Staff and Superscale)	Lower Rank Designations	Grade (Timescale)
Special Permanent Secretary	Staff Grades II, III, IV, V	Senior Principal Assistant Secretary	Timescale 10
Senior Permanent Secretary	Staff Grades I, II	Principal Assistant Secretary	Timescale 11
Permanent Secretary	Superscale A, B, C	Assistant Secretary	Timescale 12
Senior Deputy Secretary	Superscale C, D1, D	Senior Administrative Assistant	Timescale 13
Higher Deputy Secretary	Superscale D, E1, E	Administrative Assistant	Timescale 14 (entry)
Deputy Secretary	Superscale E, F, G		

Sources: Compiled from Tan (1997, p. 26) and Jones (2002, p. 74, Chart 2).

secretaries, and their departmental counterparts are the directors and deputy directors. The timescale officers in the Administrative Service are the principal assistant secretaries, assistant secretaries, and administrative assistants. Division I officers on the timescale include professional personnel working in the departmental divisions or sections responsible to section heads (Quah, 2003, p. 168). Table 1.3 provides details of the designations and grade structure of the Administrative Service.

## 1.5. ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is divided into 11 chapters. This chapter has focused on the aim of the book and has provided an overview of the eight major features of public administration in Singapore and background information on the SCS. As public administration Singapore-style is the combined result of Singapore's unique policy context and the various policies of the PAP government, Chapter 2 analyzes Singapore's policy context in terms of its geography, history, economy, demography, and political system. Chapter 3 describes the evolution of the SCS from its beginnings in 1819 until the attainment of self-government in June 1959. Chapter 4 deals with the contribution of statutory boards to Singapore's national development by discussing their origins and evolution, rationale, and functions. As the HDB is the most effective and well-known statutory board in Singapore, this

chapter focuses on the HDB as a case study of an effective statutory board by explaining how it succeeded in solving the country's serious housing shortage.

The PSC is an important public agency in Singapore as it is responsible for maintaining meritocracy in the SCS by ensuring that recruitment and promotion is based on merit. Chapter 5 analyzes the origins, rationale, and evolution of the PSC from its inception in January 1951 until the present with special emphasis on the adoption of the Shell's performance appraisal system in 1983 and the devolution of the PSC's functions from 1990. This chapter concludes with an evaluation of the PSC's effectiveness.

How does the SCS attract and retain the "best and brightest" citizens? Apart from awarding scholarships to the best students in each cohort, the PAP government has relied on periodic salary revisions from 1972 to 1994 and benchmarking with private sector salaries from 1995 to minimize the exodus of talented civil servants to the private sector. Chapter 6 focuses on compensation in the SCS and traces the evolution of salary increases from 1972 to 1994. It concludes with an analysis of the consequences of relying on competitive salaries to retain people in the SCS.

Chapter 7 describes Singapore's approach to administrative reform by emphasizing the importance of focusing on both institutional and attitudinal aspects of reform. The British colonial government had neglected administrative reform as it was more concerned with the exploitation of the natural resources in the region for the benefit of Britain. In contrast, the PAP government initiated the comprehensive reform of the SCS in 1959 and has continued to rely on administrative reforms to deal with the problems faced by the SCS. Chapter 8 continues the analysis of administrative reforms in Singapore by focusing on PS21, which was introduced in May 1995. After discussing the rationale, components, and impact of PS21, the problems encountered in implementing this major reform are analyzed.

Unlike many Asian countries, Singapore has succeeded in minimizing corruption. Chapter 9 explains how the PAP government has dealt with the problem of corruption by introducing the POCA in 1960 and ensuring that the CPIB is impartial in enforcing the law. Since Singapore's success in combating corruption has gained worldwide attention, this chapter also identifies the lessons which other Asian countries can learn from Singapore's experience.

Chapter 10 analyzes the PAP government's philosophy of governance in terms of its objectives, assumptions about human nature, and the nine strategies for intervention. Bearing in mind the constraints imposed by Singapore's policy context (discussed in Chapter 2) and the negative and

elitist views of human nature, the PAP leaders have relied on these nine strategies to attain the twin objectives of maintaining political stability and maximizing economic growth in Singapore.

The final chapter attributes the nature of public administration Singapore-style to the combined effect of the policies of the PAP government and the favorable policy context. Consequently, it would be difficult to replicate public administration Singapore-style *in toto* in other Asian countries because of the differences in the policy context and the policies adopted by their governments. Nevertheless, in spite of these contextual differences, Singapore's experience in public administration can offer some useful lessons for these countries.

## NOTES

1. See Table 11.1 in Chapter 11.
2. This distinction was made by Waldo (1955, p. 3).
3. For two comprehensive efforts to distinguish between public and private administration, see Murray (1975) and Rainey, Backoff, and Levine (1976).
4. For case studies of Singapore Airlines, see Ling (1994), Chang, Yeong, and Loh (1996), Wee and Koh (2004), and Heracleous, Wirtz, and Pangarkar (2006).
5. For a detailed analysis of meritocracy in the SCS, see Tan (1997).
6. Details of these salary increases are provided in Chapter 6.



# CHAPTER 2

## SINGAPORE'S POLICY CONTEXT

The task [of politics] will be more fruitfully performed if the citizen, and his agents in public offices, understand the ecology of government.

– John M. Gaus (1947, p. 19)

### 2.1. MEANING OF POLICY CONTEXT

In 1947, John Merriman Gaus contended that “the study of public administration must include its ecology” (Gaus, 1947, p. 6). He elaborated on the importance of the ecological approach in public administration thus:

An ecological approach to public administration builds, then, quite literally from the ground up; from the elements of a place – soils, climate, location, for example – to the people who live there – their numbers and ages and knowledge, and the ways of physical and social technology by which from the place and in relationships with one another, they get their living. It is within this setting that their instruments and practices of public housekeeping should be studied so that they may better understand what they are doing, and appraise reasonably how they are doing it. (Gaus, 1947, pp. 8–9)

To explain “the ebb and flow of the functions of government,” Gaus recommended these seven factors: “people, place, physical technology, social technology, wishes and ideas, catastrophe, and personality” (Gaus, 1947, p. 9). Similarly, Fred W. Riggs also advocated the use of the ecological approach in the comparative study of administrative systems in 1962 (Riggs, 1962, pp. 2–3).

According to Ivan L. Richardson and Sidney Baldwin, the ecological perspective on public administration is based on “the idea that public administrators operate in an environment which *constrains* them, but that what the public administrators do may, in turn, affect the environment” (Richardson & Baldwin, 1976, p. 24). More importantly, the environment in a country influences to a great extent the nature of its public administration because

It is from the environment that the public administrator perceives the problems to be resolved, the alternative possibilities between choices to be made, the resources to be

employed, and the support and opposition to policies and programs. Further, *within* the environment are found the clients to be served or regulated, the market forces which establish the costs for the goods and services “produced” by government, special-interest groups . . . and other public and private institutions that may offer support or opposition. Finally, it is *within* the environment that the consequences of public administration are judged to be “right” or “wrong.” (Richardson & Baldwin, 1976, p. 24).

Following Gaus and Riggs, the study of public administration in a country must begin with an analysis of its ecology or its policy context. Howard M. Leichter has defined the policy context in terms of “a simultaneous interplay of more than one situational, structural, cultural, or environmental influence” (Leichter, 1979, p. 40). More specifically, Leichter has provided a comprehensive accounting scheme of 37 factors for analyzing the policy context in a county (Leichter, 1979, pp. 41–42). However, for this chapter, Singapore’s policy context is analyzed in terms of its geographical, historical, economic, demographic, and political aspects which influence the nature and style of its public administration.

Since a country’s policy context also “provides policy makers with both opportunities and constraints” (Leichter, 1979, p. 50), this chapter contends that Singapore’s policy context has been advantageous for its incumbent government’s efforts in public administration as its contextual factors are conducive for the formulation and implementation of public policies. Indeed, apart from capitalizing on Singapore’s advantages, the PAP government has also overcome the lack of natural resources by educating the population and reducing its reliance on neighboring Malaysia for water by building a desalinization plant and more reservoirs for collecting water. In other words, Singapore’s political leaders have dealt with the country’s resource and policy constraints by “making a virtue” of these weaknesses (Warrington, 1994, p. 114).

Singapore has changed a great deal during the past five decades after its attainment of self-government from the British in June 1959. Table 2.1 summarizes the major changes in the country’s policy context during 1959 to 2008 which are relevant for the analysis of public administration in Singapore. The following five sections discuss in turn Singapore’s geography, history, economy, demography, and political system.

## **2.2. GEOGRAPHY: THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING SMALL**

Geography can be an obstacle if the physical location, size, or topography of a country hinders the implementation of public policies. When Singapore

**Table 2.1.** Changes in Singapore's Policy Context (1959–2008).

Indicator	Policy Context in 1959	Policy Context in 2008	Change
Land area	581.5 sq km	710.2 sq km	+128.7 sq km (× 22%)
Population	1.58 million	4.83 million	+3.25 million (× 3)
Gross domestic product per capita	S\$1,330 (US\$443)	S\$53,192 (US\$37,597)	+S\$51,862 (× 40)
Unemployment rate	14%	2.2%	−11.8% (× − 6.4)
Official foreign reserves	S\$1,151 million (US\$383.8 million)	S\$250,346 million (US\$155,627.1 million)	+S\$249,195 million (× 218)
Population living in public housing	9%	82%	+73% (× 9)
Government expenditure on education	S\$63.39 million	S\$8,246.3 million	+S\$8,182.9 million (× 130)
Extent of corruption	High	Low	Minimized

Sources: Department of Statistics (1983); “Key Annual Indicators” available from <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html>; Department of Statistics (2009, p. 258, Table 19.17); and Chan (2002, p. 15).

attained self-government from the British in June 1959, its land area was only 581.5 sq km. However, its size has increased by 128.7 sq km (an increase of 22 percent) to 710.2 sq km in 2008 during the past 50 years because of land reclamation. Indeed, Singapore's diminutiveness is obvious as its land area is equivalent to the size of Lake Biwa (*Biwa-ko*) near Kyoto in Japan or Lake Taupo in North Island, New Zealand.

Singapore's smallness is advantageous for the formulation and implementation of policies as communication is not a serious problem and it facilitates political control by the leadership. A second advantage is that Singapore's small size enhances administrative coordination and promotes responsiveness by public officials. As a small country, Singapore also benefits from greater flexibility of administration (Streeten, 1993, p. 200).

Unlike larger Asian countries such as China, India, or Indonesia, Singapore's compactness has contributed to a highly centralized public bureaucracy, which does not face the same problems afflicting a federal civil service in its interaction with the state, provincial, or local-level bureaucracies. Thus, the absence of a large rural sector in Singapore not only reinforces the centralized nature of its civil service, but also means that it is not burdened by problems arising from implementing reforms in the rural areas or provinces (Quah, 1984d, pp. 109–110).

Paul Streeten has attributed the rapid growth of the city states of Hong Kong and Singapore to the “absence of a rural hinterland” which means that the insignificant agricultural sector has not hindered their growth (Streeten, 1993, p. 199). Indeed, agriculture is not important in Singapore because “the British experiment in growing agricultural crops floundered as Singapore’s soil proved unsuitable” (Tan, Eng, & Robinson, 2007, p. 11). Consequently, Singapore has to import the food required for its population from its neighbor, Malaysia, and other countries.

Singapore’s strategic location at the southern tip of West Malaysia has enabled it to become an entrepot for the region through the trans-shipment of raw materials such as rubber and tin to Europe and the United States and imported goods to countries in the region. Its deep natural harbor has been advantageous for developing Singapore’s port, which is the world’s busiest container port, the world’s top bunkering hub, and busiest port in terms of shipping tonnage (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2007, p. 133). Apart from developing its port, the government has also capitalized on its location by making Singapore a major aviation hub in the region by developing a new third terminal at Changi Airport, which began operating in January 2008 and increased its handling capacity to 67 million passengers annually (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2007, p. 136).

The PAP government has also minimized the land constraint to build a world-class city by investing in capital and technology. For example, reliance on new reclamation techniques has resulted in deeper reclamation and more rapid use of reclaimed land. A deep tunnel sewerage system will be constructed to replace the many open sewage treatment plants. A third example is the construction of the Northeast Mass Rapid Transit line, which has saved land and has less environmental impact, as it is entirely underground (Lim, 1998, pp. 35–36).

### **2.3. HISTORY: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE**

The British ruled Singapore for nearly 140 years, from its founding in January 1819 by Stamford Raffles until the attainment of self-government in June 1959. A distinct civil service was formed during the period of crown colony rule (1867–1942). The 1947 Trusted Commission recommended that the civil service be divided into four divisions according to the duties,

educational qualifications, and salaries of its members. In his 1966 comparative analysis of the bureaucracies in Burma, Ceylon, India, Malaysia, and Pakistan, Ralph Braibanti observed that “the apparatus and attitude left by the British has endured for nearly two decades after independence and has shown a remarkable quality of resilience” (Braibanti, 1966, p. 643). Braibanti’s observation also applies to Singapore as the fourfold division of the civil service introduced in 1947 has remained unchanged for the past 62 years and provides the basis for determining the points of entry, salary scales, and fringe benefits in the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) today (Teo, 1985, p. 312).

The British colonial government introduced two important reforms during the early 1950s which have strengthened the contemporary SCS tremendously. First, meritocracy was introduced in Singapore by the British with the establishment of the Public Service Commission (PSC) in January 1951 to keep politics out of the civil service by rejecting the spoils system, and to accelerate the localization of the civil service by recruiting qualified local candidates. As discussed in Chapter 5, the PAP government has retained the PSC, which has attracted the “best and brightest” Singaporeans to join the SCS by awarding scholarships to the best students in each cohort.

Second, the British colonial government was also responsible for creating the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) in October 1952 to replace its ineffective predecessor, the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) of the Criminal Investigation Department in the Singapore Police Force (SPF). In other words, the British colonial government realized the folly of relying on the ACB to curb corruption when there was extensive police corruption, and corrected its mistake by establishing the CPIB as an agency independent of the SPF. The CPIB’s role in curbing corruption in Singapore is analyzed in detail in Chapter 9.

## **2.4. ECONOMIC GROWTH: FROM POVERTY TO AFFLUENCE**

A country’s economy can hinder national development if financial resources are scarce and if there are inadequate trained personnel. Indeed, scarcity of resources is the most important economic obstacle to development which requires the investment of much time, effort, and resources. On the other hand, an affluent country will have less difficulty in implementing development programs as it has the required financial and human resources.

Table 2.1 shows that Singapore's GDP per capita has grown by 40 times from S\$1,330 in 1960 to S\$53,192 in 2008. According to the Department of Statistics, the average monthly household income for Singaporeans increased from S\$3,076 in 1990 to S\$4,716 in 1997. The proportion of households earning more than S\$3,000 a month rose from 37 percent in 1990 to almost 60 percent in 1997. For the top 10 percent of Singaporeans, the average monthly household income has increased from S\$9,670 to S\$14,801 during 1990–1997 (Leong, 1998, p. 3). From 1995 to 2007, the average monthly household income has increased from S\$4,360 to S\$6,830 (Department of Statistics, 2008, p. 10).

Singapore's tremendous improvement in its standard of living and growth in its GDP per capita during the past 50 years and its transformation from a third world country to a first world country has been an asset in implementing development programs. The housing shortage inherited by the PAP government has been solved by the Housing and Development Board's effective public housing program which has increased the proportion of the population living in public housing from 9 percent in 1959 to 82 percent in 2008.

The lack of natural resources has also compelled the PAP government to focus on education to improve the quality of human resources in Singapore. Accordingly, it is not surprising that government expenditure on education has increased by 130 times from S\$63.39 million in 1959 to S\$8,246.3 million in 2008. A prominent trade union leader has recommended the creation of a national skills certification system for major sectors of the economy to enhance the employability of workers and the upgrading of the knowledge infrastructure to enable Singapore to become "a leading hub for management development in Asia" (Lim, 1998, pp. 41–43).

Thus, Singapore's economic affluence means that the PAP government has allocated sufficient personnel and budget to the SCS and statutory boards to enable them to perform their functions effectively. According to Doh Joon Chien, Singapore is unique as "funds for budget expenditure have never posed much of a problem in its entire budgetary history" (Doh, 1995, p. 348). Indeed, with its budget surplus, the PAP government has sufficient "funds to finance the various merit-worthy development projects" (Doh, 1995, p. 356).

## 2.5. DEMOGRAPHY: A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY

In June 2008, Singapore had a total population of 4,839,400 persons, with 3,642,700 of them (75 percent) as residents and a population density of 6,814

persons per square kilometer (Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 9, Table 1.8). Singapore's population is heterogeneous in terms of ethnic group, language, and religion. The Chinese constitute 74.7 percent of the resident population, followed by the Malays (13.6 percent), Indians (8.9 percent), and Others (2.8 percent) (Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 26, Table 3.4). Apart from the four official languages of English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, there are several Chinese dialects and a few languages among the Indians. In terms of religion, 51 percent of the population was Buddhist or Taoist in 2000, 14.9 percent was Muslim, 14.8 percent had no religion, 14.6 percent was Christian, 4 percent was Hindu, and 0.6 percent belonged to other religions.

The population's heterogeneity in race, language, and religion imposes on the PAP government two important obligations to its citizens. First, the PAP government must promote nation-building in Singapore by formulating and implementing policies to ensure racial harmony. The PAP government's second obligation is to prevent and minimize discrimination against the minority groups by ensuring that both public and private organizations are fair and impartial in their treatment of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin, language, or religion (Quah, 1996b, p. 61). This means that anyone found guilty of any criminal offence in multi-racial Singapore is punished, regardless of his or her ethnic group, language, or religion.

## **2.6. POLITICAL STABILITY AND CONTINUITY**

The PAP government has been in power for more than 50 years as it assumed office in June 1959 after winning the May 1959 general election. It was re-elected for the 11th time when it won the May 2006 general election. Table 2.2 shows the PAP's electoral performance from 1959 to 2006.

The PAP government's predominance in Singapore politics can be attributed to four factors. First, it ensured Singapore's survival after separation from Malaysia in August 1965 by minimizing the economic effects of the withdrawal of the British military forces in 1971 by encouraging foreign investment; and by strengthening the country's armed forces through the introduction of compulsory military service in 1967 and the acquisition of military hardware. The PAP government's success in encouraging foreign investment and minimizing the effects of the British military withdrawal have promoted economic growth and the population's acceptance of national service has contributed to the creation of a credible defense force (Quah, 2001, pp. 302–303).

**Table 2.2.** PAP's Electoral Performance (1959–2006).

General Election	Number of Seats Contested	Number of Seats Won by PAP	Valid Votes Won (%)	Number of Seats Won by Opposition
May 1959	51	43	54.08	8
September 1963	51	37	46.93	14
April 1968	7 (51)	58	86.72	0
September 1972	57 (8)	65	70.43	0
December 1976	53 (16)	69	74.09	0
December 1980	38 (37)	75	77.66	0
December 1984	49 (30)	79	64.83	2
September 1988	70 (11)	80	63.17	1
August 1991	40 (41)	77	60.97	4
January 1997	36 (47)	81	64.98	2
March 2001	29 (55)	82	75.29	2
May 2006	47 (37)	82	66.60	2

*Note:* The values given in brackets indicate the number of uncontested seats.

*Sources:* Ministry of Information and the Arts (1988, p. 338); Ministry of Information and the Arts (2003, p. 35); and *Sunday Times*, 7 May 2006.

Second, the PAP government gained legitimacy among Singaporeans through its effective response to the communist and communal threats and the problem of corruption. It combated communism and communalism by relying on such positive measures as the promotion of economic development, the provision of relevant information, and enhancing nation-building through education, national service, public housing, national campaigns, and grassroots organizations. On the other hand, the PAP government used the Internal Security Act and the Newspaper and Printing Press Act to detain those involved in pro-communist and pro-communalist activities, which threatened Singapore's security and survival (Quah, 1985a, pp. 198–208). To deal with the problem of corruption, the PAP government introduced the Prevention of Corruption Act in 1960 which empowered the CPIB to curb corruption effectively.

Third, the vast improvement in living standards by the PAP government during the past 50 years demonstrates clearly that it has delivered the economic goods. Singapore's transformation from a poor third world country in 1959 to an affluent first world country in 2000 has legitimized the PAP government and contributed to its durability in Singapore politics.

Finally, the PAP government has dominated Singapore politics because the many opposition political parties are weak and ineffective and are not a

credible alternative. Apart from the PAP, there are 24 other registered political parties in Singapore (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2007, p. 38). However, only a few of the opposition political parties participate in general elections in Singapore. For example, in the 1991 and 1997 general elections only five opposition parties took part. There were 14 opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) after the September 1963 general election. However, this record figure of opposition MPs has not been surpassed during the past 46 years because of the severe limitations facing the opposition political parties. According to Hussin Mutalib, the internal weaknesses of the opposition political parties are “gaps in leadership, ideology and programs, how their lack of funds made for a weak party machinery, and how they all, without exception, have at one time or other been wracked with intra-party and inter-party dissensions and cleavages” (Mutalib, 2000, p. 314).

The opposition political parties in Singapore have four weaknesses. First, they are weak organizationally, inadequately funded, and have difficulty in recruiting professionals as members. Second, they lack in a rigorous selection system as they do not have the means nor are they able to recruit good candidates because of the PAP's co-optation of talented civil servants and professionals. Third, the opposition political parties have not provided a creditable alternative program to compete with the PAP government's comprehensive array of policies, and the opposition leaders have not learned from their mistakes in previous general elections. Finally, the opposition political parties have been adversely affected by the introduction of the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) scheme in 1988 as there are now only nine single member constituencies and they have to field teams of four to six candidates to contest the GRCs in a general election (Quah, 2001, pp. 305–306). As the electoral deposit<sup>1</sup> required for each candidate has increased to S\$15,000 (US\$10,602 in 2008), political parties in Singapore must be able to pay between S\$60,000 (US\$42,409) for a GRC of four MPs to S\$90,000 (US\$63,613) for a mega-GRC of six MPs if they wish to field teams in a general election.

Singapore's political stability and continuity is an important asset for the PAP government because it is highly conducive for attracting foreign investment and for enhancing the effective implementation of public policies as the political leaders can focus on meeting the long-term goals instead of being constrained by short-term considerations. The continuity of the PAP government and its commitment to curbing corruption for the past 50 years has certainly enhanced the effectiveness of its anti-corruption strategy and other public policies.

## 2.7. STRETCHING THE CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS

In his comparative study of the impact of political leadership in Italy and Japan, Richard J. Samuels has highlighted the key role of leadership thus:

I conceive of leaders as political actors who have a greater range of assets than others in the community for “stretching” the constraints of geography and natural resources, institutional legacies and international location . . . . political leadership [refers to] . . . . the “stretching of constraints.” By “constraints,” I refer to the great forces that seem to limit the choices of political actors. By “stretching,” I refer to the ways in which those actors bring resources in, take resources out, or mobilize existing resources in new ways . . . . Able leaders may regularly figure out how to circumvent the constraints that bind other, less effective ones . . . . Determined individuals will demonstrate a range of creative ways to combine resources and ideas, and to seize opportunity . . . . Leaders who create new constraints and new opportunities are “transformational.” They not only overcome the constraints that have stymied others, but they also influence – for better or worse – the ability of their political unit to survive and thrive. (Samuels, 2003, pp. 2, 5, and 6)

Using Samuels’ definition of political leadership as “stretching the constraints” of geography, natural resources, institutional legacies, and international location, the analysis of the changes in Singapore’s policy context during 1959–2008 in this chapter shows that the PAP leaders have succeeded in stretching the constraints facing them and transformed Singapore from a third world country to first world status by 2000, 41 years after their assumption of office in June 1959.

In sum, unlike other Asian countries, Singapore has a favorable policy context as its small size and population, commitment to meritocracy, clean government and racial harmony, economic affluence, and political stability have contributed to the successful implementation of many public policies. In contrast to the “vulnerable” policy environment of many small states, Singapore has an “enabling environment” which has enhanced its public sector capacity and performance (Warrington, 1994, pp. 112–113; Polidano, 1999, p. 17).

### NOTE

1. According to the Parliamentary Elections Act (Chapter 218), Section 28 (1), a candidate has to deposit “a sum equal to 8 percent of the total allowances payable to a Member of Parliament in the preceding calendar year, rounded to the nearest \$500.” As the annual allowance for an MP in 2009 is S\$190,000, 8 percent of this amount is S\$15,200. Hence, a candidate has to pay a deposit of S\$15,000 during the next parliamentary election in Singapore.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE SINGAPORE CIVIL SERVICE (1819–1959)

The civil service today cannot be understood without constant reference to its past.

– Drewry and Butcher (1991, p. 31)

The contemporary Singapore Civil Service (SCS) can only be understood by tracing its origins and its evolution during the 140 years of British colonial rule and the Japanese Occupation. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the origins and growth of the SCS from its inception in 1819 until the attainment of self-government in June 1959. It describes and analyzes the SCS's evolution in terms of these five phases: (1) the pre-colony phase (1819–1867); (2) the period of crown colony rule (1867–1942); (3) the Japanese Occupation (1942–1945); (4) the post-war period (1945–1955); and (5) the Labor Front coalition government period (1955–1959).<sup>1</sup> Each stage of the SCS's development will be discussed in turn, beginning with its origins during the pre-colony phase.

### **3.1. THE PRE-COLONY PHASE (1819–1867)**

The origins of the SCS can be traced to the civil service established by the English East India Company (EIC) in 1786, when the EIC began its operations in Malaya with the acquisition of Penang as a settlement from the Sultan of Kedah (Tilman, 1964, p. 40; Jones, 1953, p. 7). The EIC used the term “civil service” to distinguish its civilian employees from those working in the military, maritime, and ecclesiastical organizations. There were three types of civil servants then: those who were covenanted, i.e., occupying senior positions requiring a bond of 500 British pounds as security to ensure the performance of their duties; those who were uncovenanted; and

extra-covenanted officers who were granted covenants locally because of their exceptional administrative capabilities (Blunt, 1937, pp. 1–2).

Stamford Raffles joined the EIC in London as a clerk and was promoted in 1805 and sent to Penang to serve as an Assistant Secretary (Turnbull, 1977, p. 6). During this year, Penang's status was elevated to that of an Indian Presidency and the EIC formed the Straits Settlements Civil Service (SSCS), with the junior officers being recruited from the Bengal Civil Service (Jones, 1953, p. 12). Raffles served as Lieutenant-Governor of Java from 1811 to 1816, and he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen in 1818. On 28 January 1819, Raffles founded Singapore when he anchored "his fleet of eight ships off St. John's Island, close to the mouth of the Singapore" (Turnbull, 1977, pp. 6, 8).

As there was no tradition of a separate civil service in Singapore in 1819, Raffles began the tradition with the creation of the nucleus of the civil service through the appointment of his deputy, Major William Farquhar, as the Resident, and these six officials: Lieutenant Francis Crossley, Assistant Resident; F.J. Bernard, Master Attendant; Lieutenant Henry Ralph, Assistant Engineer; Lieutenant Dow, Temporary Cantonment Adjutant; Mr Montgomery, Assistant Surgeon; and Mr Prendergast, Acting Assistant Surgeon (Ong, 1959, p. 13). From 1819 to 1823, Raffles supervised the administration of Singapore from Bencoolen by delegating the actual supervision of political and administrative matters to Major Farquhar and his team.

Raffles made Farquhar the Resident in view of his experience as the Resident of Malacca from 1803 to 1818 and as an engineer in the Riau-Lingga islands (Ong, 1959, p. 9). As the Resident, Farquhar was responsible for handling correspondence with private individuals and Malay chiefs, keeping the civil and treasury accounts, registering those who placed themselves under the British flag's protection, and dealing with applications for land. In addition, Farquhar was also the Chief Magistrate, the Garrison Commander, and the Official Engineer (Ong, 1959, pp. 11–12, 14).

Farquhar's administration of Singapore was marred by two weaknesses. First, recruitment and selection to the positions was by means of patronage, and nepotism was not uncommon. As Raffles had reserved the positions of Master Attendant and Storekeeper for his brother-in-law, Captain Flint, Farquhar could only appoint his son-in-law, F.J. Bernard, to these positions on a temporary basis. Consequently, when Captain Flint became the Master Attendant and Storekeeper in May 1820, Farquhar appointed Bernard as Chief of the Police Department (Ong, 1959, pp. 15, 43), which consisted of "one constable, one jailer, one writer, one tindal and eight persons" (Turnbull, 1977, p. 18).

The second weakness afflicting Farquhar's administration was his strained relationship with Raffles, which was exacerbated by Flint's unwillingness to take orders from Farquhar (Ong, 1959, p. 43). This problem became obvious when Farquhar asked for more personnel to cope with the increased workload of his office. Raffles rejected Farquhar's request and ordered him "to hold expenses to a minimum, since London would balk at keeping Singapore if it became an expensive burden like Penang or Bencoolen." Raffles reduced Farquhar's staff to one clerk in 1820, and Farquhar administered Singapore on "a shoestring budget and spent less on salaries in a year than Bencoolen did in a month" (Turnbull, 1977, p. 16).

Consequently, Farquhar was forced to hire, at his own expense, two clerks to help him perform his official duties in 1822 (Turnbull, 1977, p. 16). On the other hand, Raffles readily agreed to his brother-in-law's request for more manpower, and in 1823 the staff of the Master Attendant's Establishment was increased "when Flint was allowed a European Assistant, two clerks, a boatswain, two peons, and three boat crew" (Ong, 1959, p. 16). Needless to say, such irrational allocation of manpower by Raffles hindered the efficiency of Farquhar's administration.

The final feature of Farquhar's administration was the predominance of military personnel. This feature was described by Ong Tiong Whatt thus:

One of the noticeable features among the officers of the government of Singapore was the big number of military personnel employed, even in civilian posts. The settlement therefore seemed to resemble a military establishment, even though one of the main reasons for its founding had been the China trade. (Ong, 1959, p. 17)

In July 1826, Singapore became part of the Straits Settlements together with Malacca and Penang, which served as the capital. However, Penang's inability to meet the political and economic expectations of the EIC led to the transfer of the capital to Singapore in 1832, and the appointment of Raffles as the Governor-General (Quah, 1978a, p. 411).

During its first phase of development, the SCS was mixed in composition as it consisted of covenanted, uncovenanted, and extra-covenanted officers, with the latter referring to those officers who were granted covenants locally. The covenanted civil servants were recruited from England and were trained at the EIC's administrative school at Haileybury and usually occupied important positions. In contrast, the uncovenanted civil servants were recruited from "the local people or from those Europeans who settled in the territories" administered by the EIC, and appointed to the subordinate and clerical grades (Lee, 1976, pp. 88–89).

The problem of overstaffing in the SSCS, which was caused by the lack of uniformity in recruitment patterns, coupled with the incurring of substantial deficits by the Straits Settlements resulted in the lowering of their constitutional status to a Residency in 1830 and in a drastic reduction of its manpower. For example, at one time the SCS had only “three senior civil servants who shared among themselves the posts of Superintendent of Convicts, Chief of Police, Superintendent of Lands, Magistrate, Commissioner of the Court of Requests and Superintendent of Public Works” (Seah, 1971, p. 3). Furthermore, the salaries of senior civil servants in the Straits Settlements were lower than those of their counterparts in India, and opportunities for advancement were also limited for the former. In other words, the conditions in the SCS during this period were unsatisfactory.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2. CROWN COLONY RULE (1867–1942)

The pre-colony phase ended in 1867 when the Straits Settlements became a crown colony and its control passed from the India Office to the Colonial Office (Jeffries, 1956, p. 81). In 1869, Lord Granville, Secretary of State for the Colonies, decided to establish a separate colonial service for the Straits Settlements. In 1882, the SSCS was joined with the Hong Kong and Ceylon Services to form the Eastern Cadetship with the aim of conducting a common examination for prospective candidates (Seah, 1971, p. 10).

However, the reliance on a common examination did not result in the selection of the best candidates for the SSCS because, in the view of the Bucknill Commission of 1919, the “most brilliant candidates” preferred the Home Service or the Indian Civil Service, because the Straits Settlements Cadet Service had “the lowest priority rating” in the Eastern Cadetship (Seah, 1971, p. 11). In 1934, the Colonial Office discarded the use of competitive examinations and introduced the Malayan Establishment Agreement that “provided for the setting up of a common pool of senior officers to staff the more important posts in the Civil Service structures of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States” (Seah, 1971, p. 11a). A Malayan Establishment Office was created to recruit, train, and post officers.

This period of crown colony rule is important for three reasons. First, this period saw the beginnings of a distinct civil service and the establishment of many of the structural arrangements and bureaucratic practices which can be found in the contemporary public bureaucracy. The Singapore branch of the SSCS in 1867 was organized on a functional basis and was made up of

11 departments such as the Colonial Engineer's Office, Surveyor-General's Department, Medical Department, Police Department, Audit Office, Secretariat, Treasury, Printing Office, Master-Attendant's Office, Prisons Department, and the Ecclesiastical Office (Seah, 1971, p. 16).

Second, as the legislative and executive councils were dominated by senior civil servants, actual authority rested with them as the unofficial council members could not pressure the government or civil servants into accepting their suggestions. Consequently, the civil servants were freed from legislative control and could "over-ride the views of the unofficial members and public opinion" (Seah, 1971, p. 8). In other words, the colonial civil servants constituted the *de facto* government as "they determined and implemented political and administrative policies, which were approved by a legislature over which they had full control" (Seah, 1971, pp. 8–9).

Third, entrance to the civil service was restricted to Europeans and local candidates with the required qualifications were offered junior positions and discriminated against in terms of salaries and working conditions. For example, local doctors were appointed as assistant surgeons to their European superiors even though their qualifications were recognized by the General Medical Council in London (Seah, 1971, p. 14). More importantly, there was a "glaring" disparity in salary and working conditions between the local and European civil servants. According to Seah Chee Meow:

An officer in the Straits Settlements Civil Service had to work seven years before reaching the initial salary of a Malayan Civil Service cadet. Alternatively, this local officer had to serve for twenty-two years to reach the maximum salary of \$8,400 per annum, a figure surpassed by the Malayan Civil Service officer in his eleventh year of service. (Seah, 1971, p. 14)

Not surprisingly, this situation led to discontent among the local civil servants and was responsible for their struggle against such discrimination during the post-war period.

The SCS performed two functions during this phase "to establish the writ of the colonial regime and to create an environment conducive to economic modernization" (Seah, 1971, p. 20). The first function was necessary because "the inhabitants were racially and culturally different from the British" (Seah, 1971, p. 20). To deal with the problem of secret societies among the predominantly Chinese population, the police force was expanded and a Special Constabulary was created. In 1877, the Chinese Protectorate was formed to enable the colonial government to exercise control over the newly arrived Chinese immigrants. It also settled disputes among the secret societies and provided protection for these immigrants (Seah, 1971, p. 22;

Lee, 1991, pp. 25–26). Similarly, the Monopolies Department was established in 1909 to control the sale of opium, tobacco, and liquor. Furthermore, the increasing workload of the Treasury led to its expansion into four divisions in 1907 (Seah, 1971, pp. 16–17).

The second function of creating an attractive environment for economic development was also essential because it was “the sine qua non of colonialism.” Accordingly, the SCS concentrated on the construction of roads and improvement of communications and provided “a laissez-faire climate conducive to unhampered capitalism” (Seah, 1971, p. 23). An analysis of the civil service’s expenditure from 1867 to 1937 has confirmed that an average of 45 percent was spent on economic development, 36 percent on state-building, 13 percent on social services, and 6 percent on nation-building (Seah, 1971, p. 21, Table 1.2). This focus on economic roles was not surprising and took the form of building such infrastructure as roads and the communications network. The civil service also employed a legalistic approach to solve its problems and the nation-building function was neglected as “there was no attempt whatsoever to inculcate positive values and norms which could contribute to the strengthening of the political regime” (Seah, 1971, p. 23).

Thus, during the period of Crown Colony rule, the SCS established “a system of administration based on English law as adapted to the local setting and the creation of an infrastructure conducive to trade and commerce” (Seah, 1971, p. 24).” In other words, the SCS was preoccupied during 1867–1942 with enforcing colonial rule in Singapore and the economic exploitation of the natural resources of the region for the benefit of the home government in Britain (Quah, 1978a, p. 424). As such, the SCS did not play an important role in national development and did not introduce major administrative reforms until the post-war period.

### **3.3. THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION (1942–1945)**

The Japanese occupied Singapore for three and a half years from 15 February 1942 until their surrender to the British on 15 August 1945 (Turnbull, 1977, pp. 186, 217). In March 1942, the Japanese established a military administration under Colonel Watanabe, a new municipal government with Shigeo Odate as mayor, and a former consul-general, Kaoru Toyota, as his deputy (Turnbull, 1977, pp. 197–198). There was a constant friction between the civil and military authorities but in practice the municipal government was subordinate to the military administration,

which gave “top priority to security and the needs of war” (Turnbull, 1977, p. 198).

The Japanese criticized the British policy of divide and rule and announced its intention “to bring racial equality to [the] former colonial territories” (Turnbull, 1977, p. 195). On 25 April 1942, the *Syonan Shimbun* declared that “Nippon not only desires, but insists upon, interracial harmony in all territories within her sphere of influence . . . The old system of administration in Malaya, with its careful fostered policies of preferential treatment to some and oppressive restrictions to others resulted in political pariahdom as the fate of all.”<sup>3</sup> However, in practice, the Japanese treated the Chinese more harshly as they “were always the first to be squeezed for money or arrested for suspicion of petty crimes.” Thousands of Chinese were also tortured and killed by the *Kempetai* or military police (Turnbull, 1977, p. 202).

The shortage of senior administrators resulted in “inexperienced men of inferior caliber” being put in charge of administration (Turnbull, 1977, p. 207). Consequently, “administration was inefficient, rules were evaded, and local businessmen took pride and pleasure in outwitting the Japanese” (Turnbull, 1977, pp. 207–208). According to Lee Kip Lin, “the Japanese right through the war at no time were they really systematic. They go about things in a rather mad fashion.” The local population also referred to the Japanese directives as “mad decrees” as the *Syonan Shimbun* had always headlined these directives as “M.A.D. [Military Administration Department] decrees.”<sup>4</sup>

Apart from being unsystematic, there was also a lack of continuity during the Japanese Occupation as there were five military administrators, five commanding generals, and eight changes of generals. As the generals were not familiar with public administration, the situation was “a recipe for chaos and frequent conflicts between the military and civilian administrations.” Furthermore, as the Japanese had no system, “no officer remained in one post for more than a month or two” and no one adhered to the decision or pattern of work of his predecessor (Lee, 2005, p. 140).

The role of the municipal government was to enforce the decrees of the military administration. Civil servants were recalled and returned to work in their former departments. However, their salaries were reduced by the military administration to save money (Lee, 2005, p. 142). The municipal government took over some of the government offices and all the activities of the former Municipality. The British system was replaced on 1 August 1942 by these five bureaus: General Affairs Bureau; Bureau of Welfare of People; Economic Bureau; Undertaking Bureau; and Police Bureau

**Table 3.1.** Structure of the Municipal Government (August 1942 to August 1945).

Bureau	Departments
General Affairs Bureau	Secretary's Department Accountant's Department Treasurer's Department Revenue Department Superintendent's Department
Bureau of Welfare of People	Department of Custodian of Enemy Property Department of Promotion of Wellbeing of People Education Department Medical Department Health Department Town Cleansing Department
Economic Bureau	Department of Commerce and Industry Food Control Department Department of Agriculture and Forestry
Undertaking Bureau	Engineering Department Water Department Electrical Department Gas Department Traffic Department
Police Bureau	Police Affairs Department Peace Department Criminal Department Special Branch

Source: Lee (1956, p. 8).

(Lee, 1956, p. 8). Table 3.1 shows the 23 departments that were under the jurisdiction of these five bureaus.

The Japanese also established *kumiai* or guild associations to control the supply of essential materials for the army's needs, but "in practice the *kumiai* system produced a government-protected black market, controlled at the top by a handful of Japanese businessmen, and operated by local entrepreneurs" (Turnbull, 1977, p. 202). This monopolistic situation "encouraged unscrupulous businessmen to turn to bribery and other methods to get supplies" (Lee, 2005, p. 159).

To cope with the rising inflation, the poorly paid civil servants held two jobs or resorted to black marketing which provided many opportunities for earning extra income. Consequently, trading in the black market became a way of life as "everyone was surviving on some sort of black marketing." Corruption and nepotism thrived as "everyone resorted to connections,

friends, and relatives” (Lee, 2005, p. 142). By 1944, the situation deteriorated as “inflation was galloping at breakneck speed, and the black market grew, thrived, and fed the growing corruption in the Japanese military administration” (Lee, 2005, p. 140).

Lee Gek Boi contended that the most important legacy of the Japanese Occupation was that it bred corruption. She wrote:

For all their haphazardness, the Japanese ended up producing a fearful, violent and corrupt society in occupied Singapore. Bribery, blackmail and extortion grew out of the violence and fear, the mechanisms with which the Japanese ruled their occupied territories. . . . Bribery worked wonders. From generals to the ordinary soldier, gifts and money smoothed the way. Nothing was transparent and everything was about connections and payoffs. Nothing was impossible with the right connections. . . . The life-threatening shortages of essentials bred a real sense of want, of selfishness, of greed. Shortages created the black market and a culture of thievery to fuel the market. Everyone – the Japanese included – did black marketing. . . . It would take years to undo the corruption and address the social evils that Japanese military occupation bred in Singapore. (Lee, 2005, p. 205)

Finally, apart from breeding corruption in Singapore, the Japanese Occupation also changed the attitudes of the local civil servants, especially those who had assumed important positions in the Japanese civilian administration. These civil servants were no longer “willing to accept the pre-war attitude of deference toward the expatriate officers” (Seah, 1971, p. 26).

### **3.4. THE POST-WAR PERIOD (1945–1955)**

The Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945 but the Commonwealth troops only landed in Singapore on 5 September, three weeks later (Turnbull, 1977, pp. 217–218). Singapore was made the headquarters of the British Military Administration (BMA) which was established in September 1945 “to prepare for the restoration of civilian government” (Bogaars, 1973, p. 74). The BMA faced many problems as “there was chronic overcrowding, poverty, and disease. Law and order had to be restored but this task proved difficult as the police force was badly equipped, poorly disciplined, corrupt, untrained, and hated by the public (Turnbull, 1977, p. 224).

Perhaps, the most serious problem was the Japanese Occupation’s “worst legacy” of the “corruption of public and private integrity” which was manifested in the “flourishing gambling dens and brothels, both legalized by the Japanese, the resurgence of opium smoking, universal profiteering,

and bribery” (Turnbull, 1977, p. 225). However, the BMA itself succumbed to corruption even though its senior officials were “honest men of high caliber,” their junior counterparts were unscrupulous and corrupt. Consequently, it was not surprising that the BMA “requisitioned private property arbitrarily and grossly mismanaged the distribution of rice.” The BMA’s financial inefficiency and “scandalous corruption” earned it the pejorative description as the Black Market Administration (Turnbull, 1977, p. 225).<sup>5</sup>

The BMA ended in April 1946 when Singapore became a crown colony under the governorship of Sir Franklin Gimson. In 1947, the Trusted Commission recommended that the SCS should be divided into four divisions according to the duties and salaries of the civil servants:

*Division I* containing administrative officers with high educational qualifications, legal and professional officers, and others specifically qualified by training and experience for senior posts.

*Division II* containing officers whose qualifications or responsibilities fall short of those required for Division I and officers holding “prize” posts to which officers in Division III were eligible.

*Division III* requiring a good secondary education and containing technical assistants, a number of teachers, interpreters, clerical service, and some other grades.

*Division IV* containing the more lowly paid members of the Service such as postmen, peons, watchmen, process servers, hospital assistants, and the like (Malayan Union and Singapore, 1947, p. 6, para. 44).

As departments had their own salary schemes and conditions of service, the SCS did not have a unified salary structure. The implementation of the Trusted Commission’s recommendation enhanced the control of the Colonial Secretariat over the departments and led to the rationalization of the SCS’s salary structure (Seah, 1971, p. 30).

One year earlier, the British colonial government issued a White Paper on *The Organization of the Colonial Service* (Command Paper no. 197) which recommended the formation of public service commissions (PSCs) in the British colonies to ensure that qualified local candidates would be recruited into the public services. Accordingly, the Trusted Commission recommended the creation of a PSC to provide qualified local candidates with the opportunity of obtaining appointments in the public services (Malayan Union and Singapore, 1947, p. 12, para. 109). Consequently, a PSC was established in January 1951 to introduce meritocracy in the SCS

by ensuring that recruitment and promotion was based on merit and not on patronage or nepotism.<sup>6</sup>

In 1948, three years before the formation of the PSC, local officials were recruited to the upper administrative grades of the SCS. However, they “became dissatisfied at the disparity between themselves and foreigners in conditions of service and promotion prospects” (Turnbull, 1977, p. 252). Consequently, when the British colonial government decided in 1952 to pay special expatriation allowances to European officials, the local civil servants formed a Council of Joint Action to organize a “mass-demonstration which forced the authorities to pay more allowances to low-paid local employees, and it converted the question of Malayanization into a major political issue (Turnbull, 1977, p. 252). The local officials felt that the process of Malayanization was proceeding at a snail’s pace as only 37 (or 7.5 percent) of the 493 Division I posts in the SCS in 1953 were occupied by them (Drysdale, 1984, p. 45).

However, an autonomous SCS was not established during the post-war period for two reasons. The first reason was that Singapore had preserved its ties with the Malayan Union as 11 departments were still administered on a pan-Malayan basis such as, Audit Department, Broadcasting Department, Chemistry Department, Civil Aviation Department, Fisheries Department, Income Tax Department, Marine Surveys Department, Meteorological Department, Postal Department, Survey Department, and Telecommunications Department (Seah, 1971, p. 31, fn. 6).

Secondly, the 1934 Malayan Establishment Agreement, which had created a common pool for staffing the senior positions in the Civil Services of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, was renewed in 1948, thus allowing the colonial authorities in Singapore to fill the more important positions in the civil service with Malayan Establishment officers (Seah, 1971, pp. 11a, 31).

However, the retention of the pan-Malayan departments and the renewal of the Malayan Establishment Agreement in the SCS had undermined the local civil servants’ prospects for promotion (Seah, 1971, p. 46). The first obstacle of the pan-Malayan departments remained as the colonial government believed that such departments would improve the links between the two territories. The second obstacle of the Malayan Establishment Agreement was removed in June 1954 with its dissolution and the officers affected were re-assigned either to Malaya or Singapore. The removal of the second obstacle resulted in the formation of a separate civil service as it led to the centralization of personnel policy in the hands of the Colonial Secretary (Seah, 1971, pp. 46–48).

### 3.5. THE LABOR FRONT COALITION GOVERNMENT PERIOD (1955–1959)

In July 1953, the British colonial government appointed Sir George Rendel to head a commission to review Singapore's constitutional position. The Rendel Commission proposed the creation of a single chamber legislative assembly of 32 members, consisting of 25 elected councilors, 3 ex-officio ministers, and 4 nominated non-officials. It also recommended the replacement of the Executive Council by a council of nine ministers, three of whom would be appointed by the Governor, and the other six recommended by the leader of the strongest party in the Legislative Assembly. The British colonial government accepted the Rendel Commission's proposals and made arrangements to hold elections to implement the new constitution in 1955 (Turnbull, 1977, pp. 242–243).

The Rendel Constitution came into force by the Singapore Colony Order in Council of February 1955 and changed Singapore's constitutional status from a crown colony to a ministerial form of government after the April 1955 election, which was held to implement it. The April 1955 election resulted in the formation of the Labor Front coalition government with David Marshall as the Chief Minister.

The Colonial Secretariat was abolished and the SCS was reorganized into nine ministries as shown in Table 3.2. This reorganization is important as it provided the basic framework for the SCS in the subsequent periods. An analysis of Table 3.2 shows that the Attorney-General's Chambers, the Chief Secretary's Office, and the Ministry of Finance were held by the ex-officio ministers who were responsible for the key functions of the administration. However, the other six ministries dealt with the welfare or distributive portfolios and were held by the elected ministers (Seah, 1971, p. 59).

As part of the decentralization of the Colonial Secretariat, the position of permanent secretary was created as the top administrative position in a ministry. A permanent secretary was responsible for the administration of the ministry, for formulation of the policy alternatives for the minister's consideration, and for implementation of the policy decisions (Seah, 1971, p. 60). A Manual of Administrative Procedures was issued to provide guidance for civil servants in their working relations with the ministers, the Council of Ministers, and the Legislative Assembly (Seah, 1971, p. 61).

The Labor Front won 10 seats in the April 1955 election and formed a coalition government with the support of the three Alliance members, the

**Table 3.2.** Reorganization of the Singapore Civil Service in 1955.

Ministry	Ministerial Status	Subjects
Attorney-General's Chambers	Ex-officio	Legal matters
Chief Secretary's Office	Ex-officio	External affairs, internal security, defense, broadcasting, public relations, establishment
Commerce and Industry	Elected	Commerce, industry, shipping, agriculture, fisheries, exchange control, imports and exports registry
Communications and Works	Elected	Public works, postal services, telecommunications
Education	Elected	Education and related matters
Finance	Ex-officio	Public finance
Health	Elected	Health and related matters
Housing, Lands, and Local Government	Elected	Housing, lands, administration of adjacent islands, town and country planning, local government
Labor and Welfare	Elected	Labor, immigration, social welfare

*Source:* Seah (1971, p. 58, Table 3.1).

three ex-officio members, and two nominated non-officials, which gave it a majority of 18 members in the 32-seat Legislative Assembly (Turnbull, 1977, p. 258). To fulfill its election pledge of localizing the SCS within four years, the Labor Front coalition government appointed a Malayization Commission to recommend a comprehensive scheme for the localization of the civil service. In its interim report, which was published in 1956, the Commission recommended, among other things, the immediate localization of four departments – the Social Welfare Department, the Imports and Exports Division, the Registry of Trade Marks and Business Names, and the Agriculture Division – and the localization of the remaining 28 departments within periods ranging from two to five years.<sup>7</sup>

The implementation of the Rendel Constitution in April 1955 also introduced the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, with six portfolios being given to locally elected ministers and three portfolios under the charge of ex-officio ministers, who were expatriate civil servants. However, this did not result in the control of the SCS by the elected ministers as the ex-officio ministers dominated “the politics of the legislature and the Civil Service as they were in control of the more important state-building portfolios” (Seah, 1971, p. 56). Consequently, the elected ministers were ignored by the civil servants, who realized that “actual power remained vested” in the three ex-officio ministers (Seah, 1971, p. 56).

In December 1956, the Legislative Assembly accepted the Malayanization Commission's majority report, which "advocated complete localization of administrative posts in two years and the rest of the [civil] service in four [years]" (Turnbull, 1977, p. 267). The PSC was given full executive powers in 1957 and the process of Malayanization was accelerated (Turnbull, 1977, p. 267). The remaining obstacle to the establishment of an autonomous SCS was removed with the dissolution of the 11 pan-Malayan departments after the attainment of independence by the Federation of Malaya on 31 August 1957. Thus, by the end of the Labor Front coalition government period, the SCS had assumed a character of its own as it was no longer dominated by the expatriate officers as a result of localization; nor was it tied administratively to Malaya after the latter's attainment of independence and the dissolution of the 11 pan-Malayan departments.

The Labor Front coalition government "handed over the machinery of government intact and unimpaired" to the PAP government, which assumed office in June 1959 after winning the May 1959 general election (Turnbull, 1977, p. 270). The SCS which the PAP government inherited consisted of nine ministries with a total of 28,253 employees (State of Singapore, 1961, p. 41).

This chapter has described the evolution of the SCS from its beginnings in 1819 with the seven officials appointed by Stamford Raffles until the attainment of self-government in June 1959. Apart from the growth of the SCS to 28,253 civil servants after 140 years, the patronage and nepotism which began during Farquhar's administration was replaced by meritocracy in January 1951 with the establishment of the PSC. Throughout the 140-year period, the civilian administrators were in charge except during Farquhar's administration and the Japanese Occupation, when the military was predominant. The discrimination toward the local civil servants during the British colonial period began to be redressed with the localization of the SCS in 1956 and ended with the attainment of self-government in June 1959.

While the SCS has grown by more than 4,000 times from its original nucleus of seven officials during 1819–1959, it did not play a significant role in national development as it was an instrument of the British colonial government and was subject to the latter's control and policies (Quah, 1984c, p. 289). However, as the subsequent chapters will show, the SCS has grown not only in size but also in its workload and responsibilities during the last 50 years under the PAP government.

## NOTES

1. This analysis of the SCS's evolution is based on the detailed analysis of the SCS's development from 1819 to 1959, in Seah (1971, Chapters 1–4).
2. For an analysis of the weaknesses of the Straits Settlements Civil Service, see Lee (1976) and Bal (1960).
3. Quoted in Turnbull (1977, p. 195).
4. Quoted in Lee (2005, p. 138).
5. For details on corruption in Singapore during the British colonial period, see Chapter 9.
6. The origins and functions of the PSC are discussed in Chapter 5.
7. For a detailed analysis of the localization issue, see Seah (1971, pp. 111–139).



# CHAPTER 4

## STATUTORY BOARDS

Today they [statutory boards] constitute important pillars of the social and economic edifice on which the efficiency of the Republic of Singapore is built.

– Howe (1979, p. 89)

Statutory boards have played an important role in Singapore's national development and this was acknowledged symbolically for the first time through their participation in the national day parade on 9 August 1976 during the 11th anniversary of the country's independence (Quah, 1977, p. 210). Eight months after assuming office, the PAP government established the Housing and Development Board (HDB) as the first statutory board on 1 February 1960 to tackle the serious housing shortage. One and half years later, the Economic Development Board (EDB) was created as the third statutory board in August 1961 to solve the growing unemployment problem by attracting foreign investment to Singapore.

The success of the HDB and EDB, in solving the housing shortage and unemployment problem, respectively, has vindicated the PAP government's reliance on statutory boards to accelerate the implementation of socio-economic development programs in Singapore. More importantly, the effectiveness of these two statutory boards led to a proliferation of statutory boards as there are 63 statutory boards today.

This chapter analyzes the contribution of statutory boards to Singapore's development by examining their origins and evolution, rationale, and functions. As the HDB is perhaps the most well-known statutory board in Singapore, the fifth section of this chapter provides an analysis of the HDB as a case study of an effective statutory board. However, it is necessary to begin by specifying the meaning of a statutory board in the Singapore context.

### 4.1. WHAT IS A STATUTORY BOARD?

A statutory board is one of the three forms of public enterprise in Singapore which are involved directly or indirectly in economic development. Tan

Chwee Huat has defined a statutory board as “an autonomous government agency set up by special legislation to perform specific functions (Tan, 1974, p. 102).” Similarly, Lee Boon Hiok has referred to statutory boards as “a catchall phrase for the statutory bodies which have been established by an Act of Parliament,” which specifies their rationale as well as their rights and powers (Lee, 1975, pp. 38–39).

A comprehensive definition of a statutory board requires a discussion of its legal status, management, the status of its employees, and its financial arrangements. In terms of legal status, a statutory board is not part of the civil service and does not enjoy the legal privileges and immunities of government departments. However, unlike government departments, statutory boards have more autonomy and flexibility in performing their functions as they are responsible for their law suits, agreements and contracts, as well as the acquisition and disposal of property in their own names.

The management of a statutory board is usually in the hands of three groups of people. At the highest level is the Board of Directors whose members are senior civil servants, businessmen, professionals, and trade unionists. The Chairman of the Board of Directors, who is usually a Member of Parliament (MP), a top civil servant or a distinguished person in a certain field, is appointed by the Minister who has jurisdiction over the statutory board concerned. Below the Board of Directors is the management team which consists of a general manager or executive director (who is also a board member), a secretary, and the various departmental heads. The third group is the supporting staff of administrative officers, executive officers, and clerical workers to implement the decisions made by the Board of Directors and the management team (Ow, 1976, p. 173).

The employees of a statutory board are not civil servants as they are not part of the civil service. This means that they are not recruited and selected by the Public Service Commission (PSC) except in those cases when statutory boards have requested the PSC’s help in recruiting senior officers. For example, in 1977, 10 statutory boards had asked the PSC to recruit and select their senior officers (PSC, 1978, p. 7). After the devolution of its personnel functions to the personnel boards in the ministries from January 1995, the PSC does not provide such assistance to the statutory boards. However, the PSC has retained its role of endorsing those candidates recommended by the Special Personnel Board for appointment as chief executive officers (CEOs) of statutory boards whose job grades are superscale D and above and promoting CEOs of statutory boards to superscale D and above (PSC, 2003, p. 7).

Unlike the civil service, the salary scales, terms and conditions of service, and provisions governing promotion and disciplinary control are not

necessarily the same for each statutory board. While these matters are based on the relevant provisions of the civil service, they are not identical with those of the civil service as there are variations depending on the functions of the statutory board.

For its financial arrangements, a statutory board is expected, if possible, to take care of its recurrent expenditure from its revenue. Any unused surplus can be invested and credited to a reserve or capital fund. However, if a statutory board's recurrent expenditure cannot be covered by its revenue, it can apply for government loans at low interest rates. For example, the HDB's deficit of S\$41 million for the 1980–1981 financial year was subsidized by the government (HDB, 1981, p. 16). Similarly, non-revenue-generating statutory boards such as the EDB and the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) rely on government loans to finance their development and expansion.

Even though statutory boards are not part of the civil service, they are still subject to financial control as their accounts must be audited by the Auditor-General or an approved company auditor nominated by the Minister in charge. The Minister must also approve the annual budgetary estimates of the statutory boards and present their financial statements and annual reports to Parliament (Ow, 1976, p. 173). These financial arrangements ensure that statutory boards are accountable even though they are more autonomous and flexible in their daily operations than the civil service.

## **4.2. ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF STATUTORY BOARDS**

The first statutory board in Singapore was the Board of Commissioners of the Currency (BCC), which was established by the British colonial government in 1899 to issue currency and manage the currency fund in the Straits Settlements. The BCC's jurisdiction was extended in 1938 to include peninsular Malaya and Brunei. It was renamed the Board of Commissioners of the Currency, Malaya, and British Borneo in 1952 when Sabah and Sarawak were included. As a result of the 1967 currency split between Singapore and Malaysia, the BCC became known as the Board of Commissioners of Currency, Singapore (BCCS) (Ow, 1976, p. 165).

The Tanjong Pagar Dock Board (TPDB) was formed as the second statutory board in 1905 to modernize Singapore's port facilities. In 1913, the TPDB was replaced by the Singapore Harbor Board (SHB), which remained in existence until 1964, when it was replaced by the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) was established

by the British colonial authorities as a town planning authority on 1 July 1927 to prepare the General Improvement Plan. The deteriorating housing shortage forced the British colonial government to give the SIT the power to build in 1932 so that it could provide public housing for the lower income groups in Singapore. However, as will be discussed in the fifth section, the SIT's ineffectiveness led to its dissolution and replacement by the HDB on 1 February 1960.

The remaining two statutory boards during the colonial period were the Singapore Telephone Board (STB) and the Central Provident Fund (CPF). The STB was created on 1 January 1955 to take over the function of operating the telephone system from the Oriental Telephone and Electric Company Limited. The STB was merged with the Telecommunications Department on 1 April 1974 to form the Telecommunication Authority of Singapore (TAS) to improve efficiency by maximizing resource utilization and avoiding redundant services (Tan, 1974, p. 147). The CPF was established by the British colonial government in 1955 to provide security for the working population in Singapore. Employers and employees are required to contribute a percentage of their monthly salaries to the CPF.

As the SHB, SIT, and STB were ineffective, it is not surprising that they were transformed into the PSA, HDB, and TAS, respectively, after the attainment of self-government. The BCC and CPF were retained and renamed as the BCCS and the Central Provident Fund Board (CPFBoard), respectively. The ineffectiveness of the three statutory boards and their lack of contribution to national development during the colonial period compelled the PAP government to establish six statutory boards to accelerate the implementation of socio-economic development programs during its first five years in power.

The HDB's formation in February 1960 was followed five months later by the People's Association's creation on 1 July 1960 to deal with the communist and communal threats by controlling and coordinating the 28 community centers it inherited (Phua, 2000, pp. 1–2). No statutory board was formed until 13 months later with the establishment of the EDB in August 1961. The fourth statutory board was the Public Utilities Board (PUB), which took over the function of supplying public utilities to the population from the City Council on 1 May 1963. In January 1964, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) was created to promote tourism. Finally, as indicated earlier, the PSA replaced the ineffective SHB on 1 April 1964.

In view of their effectiveness, more statutory boards have been formed by the PAP government after the attainment of independence on 9 August 1965. Consequently, there are now 63 statutory boards in 14 ministries as shown in Table 4.1. The Ministry of Trade and Industry has 10 statutory

**Table 4.1.** Statutory Boards in Singapore by Ministry (2009).

Ministry	Statutory Boards	Number
Community Development, Youth and Sports	Hindu Endowments Board	5
	<i>Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura</i>	
	National Council of Social Service	
	People's Association	
	Singapore Sports Council	
Defense Education	Defense Science and Technology Agency	1
	Singapore Polytechnic	9
	Ngee Ann Polytechnic	
	Temasek Polytechnic	
	Nanyang Polytechnic	
	Republic Polytechnic	
	Institute of Southeast Asian Studies	
	Institute of Technical Education	
	Science Centre Board	
	Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board	
Finance	Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore	3
	Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority	
	Tote Board (Singapore Totalisator Board)	
Health	Health Promotion Board	7
	Health Science Authority	
	Singapore Dental Council	
	Singapore Medical Council	
	Singapore Nursing Board	
	Singapore Pharmacy Council	
Home Affairs	TCM Practitioners Board	2
	Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises	
Information, Communications and the Arts	Casino Regulatory Authority	6
	Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore	
	Media Development Authority	
	National Arts Council	
	National Heritage Board	
	Preservation of Monuments Board	
Law	National Library Board	2
	Intellectual Property Office of Singapore	
Manpower	Singapore Land Authority	3
	Singapore Labor Foundation	
	Central Provident Fund Board	
National Development	Singapore Workforce Development Agency	7
	Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore	
	Building and Construction Authority	
	Housing and Development Board	
	Urban Redevelopment Authority	
	Board of Architects	
	Professional Engineers Board, Singapore	
National Parks Board		

*Table 4.1. (Continued)*

Ministry	Statutory Boards	Number
Environment and Water Resources	National Environment Agency	2
	Public Utilities Board	
Trade and Industry	Agency for Science, Technology and Research (ASTAR)	10
	Competition Commission of Singapore	
	Economic Development Board	
	Energy Market Authority	
	Hotels Licensing Board	
	International Enterprise Singapore	
	JTC Corporation	
	Singapore Tourism Board	
	Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING) Singapore	
	Sentosa Development Corporation	
	Transport	
Land Transport Authority		
Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore		
Public Transport Council		
Prime Minister's Office	Civil Service College	2
	Monetary Authority of Singapore	
Foreign Affairs	None	0
Total		63

Source: Compiled from the Singapore Government Directory, available online at <http://app.sgdi.gov.sg/index.asp?cat = 1>.

boards, followed by the Ministry of Education with 9, and the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of Health, which has 7 statutory boards each. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the only Ministry without any statutory board.

### 4.3. RATIONALE FOR CREATING STATUTORY BOARDS

The proliferation of statutory boards in Singapore after the PAP government assumed office in June 1959 is not accidental but a deliberate move to promote national development. The PAP government established statutory boards in Singapore from February 1960 onwards for three reasons.

The first reason for setting up statutory boards is related to the constraints encountered by the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) in implementing

development programs. As the SCS is handicapped by its rigid regulations and lack of flexibility, it is more concerned with regulative and routine matters (Seah, 1976, p. 57). Being aware of the SCS's limitations, the PAP leaders decided to rely instead on statutory boards to accelerate the implementation of the socio-economic development programs. In other words, there is a division of labor between the SCS and the statutory boards: with the SCS being responsible for performing the regulatory and routine functions while the statutory boards, which are not affected by the procedural delays and regulations of the SCS, are created to expedite the implementation of socio-economic development programs in Singapore.

Second, statutory boards were formed by the PAP government to reduce the workload of the SCS. According to Fred W. Riggs, there are two methods of improving an organization's performance: "administrative capacities can be enhanced by reducing the number of problems to be solved by government as well as by strengthening the capacity of government to solve problems" (Riggs, 1970, p. 130). In other words, an organization's effectiveness can be increased by strengthening its capabilities or by reducing its workload.

Singapore is one of the few countries which have succeeded in combining both methods of improving administrative performance. The PAP government increased the capabilities of the SCS by improving the caliber of civil servants through training programs, and by allocating the required resources. Reduction of overloading on public agencies is achieved by relying on non-governmental agencies and equipping them "to take over a larger share of the burdens of a society" or by creating new governmental or quasi-governmental agencies to meet the overload by sharing it among a few organizations (Quah, 1975a, pp. 341–342). Thus, statutory boards have been established to reduce the workload of the SCS by implementing the various development programs.

The third reason for creating statutory boards in Singapore is to reduce the brain drain of talented civil servants to the private sector by offering more favorable salaries and working conditions than the SCS and by seconding them to the statutory boards. Eligible individuals from private companies might be persuaded to work in statutory boards because their terms of service are more favorable than those of the SCS.

Having identified the rationale for establishing statutory boards, it is necessary to describe the five methods for their formation. First, a statutory board can be formed from an existing unit or section of a statutory board. For example, the JTC was formed from a section of the EDB in 1968; and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) was created from the HDB's Urban Renewal Department in 1974.

The second method is to create a statutory board from scratch, i.e., anew and without any connection with any existing statutory board. The formation of the Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC) in May 1972 and the Industrial Training Board (ITB) in April 1973 are the two examples of statutory boards which were created from scratch.

The third way of establishing a statutory board arises from the dissolution of an existing statutory board. The most prominent example of this method is the HDB which was formed from the dissolution of its predecessor, the SIT. Similarly, the EDB emerged from the restructuring of the Industrial Promotion Board, the PSA resulted from the SHB's dissolution, and the PUB replaced the ineffective City Council.

The fourth method of creating statutory boards stems from a merger of two statutory boards or a statutory board and a government department. In April 1974, the TAS was formed from the merger of the STB and the Telecommunications Department. Five years later, the amalgamation of the ITB and the Adult Education Board (AEB) resulted in the formation of the Vocational and Industrial Training Board (VITB).

The final method involves the upgrading or reorganization of a government department into a statutory board. As shown in Box 4.1, the POSB was transformed from a government department into an autonomous statutory board in January 1972. In February 1980, the Department of Broadcasting was converted into the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation.

## 4.4. FUNCTIONS OF STATUTORY BOARDS

Statutory boards reduce the workload of the SCS by implementing various socio-economic development programs in Singapore. The important role of statutory boards in Singapore's national development becomes obvious after an examination of the following eight major functions.

### *4.4.1. Promotion of Economic Development*

When the PAP leaders assumed office in June 1959, they faced many problems including a high unemployment rate of 14 percent and the need to provide more jobs for the population (Chan et al., 2002, p. 15). Apart from providing more jobs, they realized the importance of improving the economic conditions in Singapore to minimize the communist threat by preventing the communists from exploiting the grievances of the

**Box 4.1.** Transformation of the POSB into a Statutory Board

The Post Office Savings Bank (POSB) was originally formed as part of the Postal Services Department on 1 January 1877 to encourage the lower income groups to save and to provide saving facilities for them. As a government department, the POSB was restricted by various procedures and regulations. To illustrate, the POSB was only opened for business on three days a week from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. Furthermore, depositors were required to give advance notice to withdraw funds. In the face of fierce competition from commercial banks, the POSB's deposits began to decline to S\$37.4 million in 1966. In July 1966, the management and control of the POSB was transferred from the Postmaster General of Malaya to the Postmaster General of Singapore. As a result of the incentive schemes introduced in 1968, the amount deposited with the POSB increased from S\$22.9 million to S\$57.8 million during 1968–1971.

The POSB was separated from the Postal Services Department on 1 January 1972 and became a statutory board. The POSB's increased flexibility and autonomy enabled it to become more effective as reflected in the phenomenal growth in the number of depositors and the amount deposited during its first eight years as a statutory board. The number of depositors increased from 555,000 to 1.8 million and the amount deposited rose from S\$57.8 million to S\$2.8 billion from December 1971 to December 1980. The POSB's transformation from a government department into a statutory board in 1972 was designed to free it from the cumbersome procedures and regulations which affected its operations during the pre-1972 period, and to make it more flexible and autonomous in the performance of its various functions.

*Sources:* Tan (1978, pp. 168–170) and Ministry of Culture (1982, p. 50).

unemployed or discontented Singaporeans. Furthermore, they also realized that economic development was needed to enhance the commitment of the citizens to Singapore and thereby reduce the effect of the competing loyalties of race, language, and religion (Quah, 1985a, pp. 198–199).

The declining entrepot trade, high unemployment, and the lack of natural resources forced the PAP government to rely on industrialization to create more jobs. The EDB was formed in August 1961 to spearhead and

implement the PAP government's strategy of promoting economic development through planned industrialization. During its first seven years, the EDB was responsible for promoting investment, financing industries, and developing Jurong, Singapore's first industrial town. However, as a result of its heavy workload, the EDB relinquished its second and third functions to the Development Bank of Singapore and the Jurong Town Corporation, respectively, in 1968.

To promote investment, the EDB has provided various incentives to foreign firms to invest in Singapore. In his study of the EDB's culture, Edgar H. Schein concluded that the EDB was "a very effective organization" as "the various elements of its culture align with each other and produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts" (Schein, 1996, p. 250). With a well-developed infrastructure, attractive tax incentives, stable industrial relations, and political stability, it is not surprising that Singapore has been selected by foreign companies as a preferred country for investing their money. In 1983, a survey conducted by the Association of Political Risk Analysis in New York placed Singapore among the top five countries in the world as a safe haven for investment because of its political stability (Quah, 1984b, p. 184).

The Trade Development Board (TDB) was formed in 1983 to develop Singapore as a premier international trading hub and to promote its goods and services. The TDB promoted Singapore's goods and services to overseas markets by developing a comprehensive network of overseas centers (International Enterprise Singapore, 2003, p. 13). During the 1990s, the TDB assisted companies in Singapore to take advantage of trade opportunities by "providing timely information, enhancing efficiency in trade operations and procedures, and using incentive schemes to attract investments" (International Enterprise Singapore, 2003, p. 14). To enhance Singapore's competitiveness, the TDB was restructured on 12 April 2002 and renamed as International Enterprise Singapore (IES) with its new mission of helping "Singapore-based companies to grow and internationalize" in the global market (International Enterprise Singapore, 2003, p. 15). The IES assists Singapore-based companies to start and develop their business overseas by "providing valuable market information, doing feasibility studies, and finding overseas partners" (International Enterprise Singapore, 2003, p. 15). By 2007, the IES has an impressive global network of more than 30 locations.

The function of promoting economic development is perhaps the key pillar of the PAP government's nation-building program. The PAP leaders realized from the outset that nation-building could only succeed if the citizens were committed to Singapore and an effective way of ensuring their political allegiance to Singapore was through the promotion of economic

development. The rationale for this strategy took into account the immigrant nature of the population and the fact that Singapore's survival depended on both entrepot trade and industrialization. Thus, to effectively combat the competing loyalties exerted on the local population by their countries of origin, the citizens must be given a stake in Singapore. The best way of ensuring this is to provide Singaporeans with a comfortable standard of living, which was after all the main reason for the migration of their ancestors from China and India to Singapore (Quah, 1977, p. 209).

#### *4.4.2. Development of Infrastructure and Essential Services*

As mentioned earlier, the PUB was formed on 1 May 1963 to supply electricity, water, and gas to the population. This function was performed previously by the City Council, which had 17 departments. However, the City Council was ineffective and could not cope with the increasing demand for public utilities created by the rapid growth in industry and the initiation of the public housing program. The City Council's ineffectiveness led to its dissolution and its replacement by the PUB, which was established as a monopoly as it was the only organization that supplied water, gas, and electricity to the population in Singapore.

More specifically, the PUB performed these five specific functions to fulfill its general function of providing public utilities to the population:

1. To provide, construct, and maintain catchment areas, reservoirs, and other works as required or necessary for the collection, production, supply, and use of water, gas, and electricity for public and private purposes;
2. To manage and work on the water, gas, and electrical installations transferred to the PUB and other installations as may be acquired by the PUB;
3. To secure and provide an adequate supply of water, gas, and electrical energy at reasonable prices;
4. To make regulations relating to the supply of public utilities by the PUB;
5. To advise the Government on all matters relating to the supply of public utilities; and
6. To undertake other functions as assigned by the Minister ([Public Utilities Board Ordinance, 1963, Section 15, pp. 12–13](#)).

On 1 April 2001, the PUB relinquished its function of providing electricity and gas to the population to the Energy Market Authority (EMA), which was formed as a statutory board under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of

Trade and Industry to regulate the electricity and gas industry and district cooling services in designated areas.<sup>1</sup> With this change, the PUB has become the national water agency responsible for the collection, production, distribution, and reclamation of water in Singapore.<sup>2</sup> The EMA's Power System Operation Division "ensures the security of supply of electricity to consumers and arranges for the secure operation of power system" in Singapore.<sup>3</sup>

The PUB's formation in May 1963 was followed a year later by the PSA, which was created on 1 April 1964. The PSA's major functions were:

1. The provision and maintenance of efficient services and facilities in the Port;
2. The regulation and control of navigation within the Port's jurisdiction;
3. The promotion of the use, improvement, and development of the Port;
4. The provision and maintenance of adequate and efficient lighthouses, beacons, buoys, and other navigational aids in the territorial waters of Singapore and the approaches thereto;
5. The dissemination of navigational information;
6. The provision of a ferry service for the transportation of passengers, vehicles, or goods within the territorial waters of Singapore; and
7. The performance of such duties imposed upon the PSA by the PSA Act and any other written law (Lim, 1976, pp. 7–8).

In addition, the PSA had to perform 18 additional functions described in the second schedule of the PSA Act (Lim, 1976, pp. 116–117, Appendix D).

On 2 February 1996, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) was formed by the enactment of the MPA Act of 1996 and the merger of the Marine Department, the National Maritime Board, and the Regulatory Department of the PSA. The MPA is responsible for regulating and managing port and marine services, facilities and activities within Singapore waters, including vessel traffic and navigational safety and security. The MPA is also the statutory board entrusted with the promotion and development of the Port of Singapore.<sup>4</sup>

As indicated earlier, the TAS was formed on 1 April 1974 from the STB's merger with the Telecommunications Department. The TAS was established as the national authority for the provision and operation of the national and international telecommunications service in Singapore. The TAS also served as the licensing authority and adviser to the government on matters dealing with telecommunications. However, in March 1982, TAS was replaced by SingTel, which was incorporated and became a public company in October 1993.<sup>5</sup>

The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) was established on 1 September 1984 with the enactment of the CAAS Act (Chapter 41). The CAAS is responsible for the maintenance and management of all the airports in Singapore and to provide the services and facilities required for their operations. It provides air traffic control service, flight information service, alerting service, and aeronautical information service within the Singapore Flight Information Region. The CAAS also regulates and promotes the development of air transport and advises the government on matters concerning civil aviation.<sup>6</sup>

The Registry of Vehicles, Mass Rapid Transit Corporation, Roads and Transportation Division of the Public Works Department, and the Land Transport Division of the then Ministry of Communications were merged to form the Land Transport Authority (LTA) on 1 September 1995. The LTA performs these three functions:

1. To provide an integrated, efficient, cost-effective, and sustainable land transport network to meet the country's needs;
2. To plan, develop, and manage Singapore's land transport system to support a quality environment while making optimal use of the transport measures and safeguarding the traveling public's well-being; and
3. To develop and implement policies to encourage commuters to choose the most appropriate transportation mode.<sup>7</sup>

#### *4.4.3. Public Housing and Urban Redevelopment*

The HDB was established on 1 February 1960 to implement the PAP government's low-cost public housing program. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) was formed in April 1974 when the HDB's Urban Renewal Department (URD) was upgraded into a statutory board. As the HDB's provision of public housing will be discussed in detail in the next section, what should be noted here is that the task of urban renewal was deferred to the HDB's Second Five-Year Building Program (1966–1970). The emphasis on urban renewal during that period was manifested in the creation of the URD in 1966 and the allocation of S\$125 million for urban renewal, which constituted almost one-third of the total expenditure of S\$306 million for the entire program (HDB, 1966, p. 12).

During the HDB's Third Five-Year Building Program (1971–1975), the URD was responsible for several additional functions apart from the sale of urban renewal sites and the redevelopment of the central area of city.

First, the URD acted as an agent for other ministries and statutory boards in the implementation of various projects. To illustrate, the URD planned and constructed hawker centers and markets within the central area for the Ministry of Health to provide permanent accommodation for those hawkers affected by urban renewal. Second, the URD was also entrusted with the rehabilitation and preservation of those historic and architectural buildings located in those areas slated for urban renewal. Third, the URD was involved in the United Nations Sub-Project (May 1970–December 1972), which required the preparation and subsequent evaluation of a detailed plan for the central area. Finally, the URD's other functions included resettlement projects and landscaping and environmental improvement schemes. In other words, the URD's workload increased tremendously during 1971–1975 (Quah, 1975a, pp. 483–484).

However, the HDB was unable to cope effectively with the two functions of public housing and urban renewal during the Third Five-Year Building Program as the annual building target was raised to 22,600 units and the URD's workload had doubled as a result of its additional functions. Consequently, the HDB's heavy workload was reduced by transferring the function of urban renewal to the URA, which was formed by upgrading the URD into a statutory board in April 1974. In other words, the functions of public housing and urban renewal are now shared between the HDB and URA, respectively.

#### *4.4.4. Education*

The great importance given to education is reflected in the fact that there are nine statutory boards under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MOE). Singapore's lack of natural resources and its relatively young population make education an extremely important instrument of nation-building as 704,117 persons (14.5 percent of the total population) are enrolled in the primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions in 2008 (Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 250, Table 19.1). The PAP government has realized the significant role of education in nation-building and has increased the expenditure on education by 130 times from S\$63.39 million in 1959 to S\$8,246.3 million in 2008, as indicated in Chapter 2.

There are no statutory boards responsible for tertiary education now as the two major universities – the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University – which were established as statutory boards in 1980 and 1991, respectively, became autonomous organizations

on 1 April 2006. On the other hand, there are five polytechnics providing technical education for 76,756 students, which constitute 10.9 percent of the total enrolment in educational institutions in Singapore in 2008 (Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 250, Table 19.1). The Singapore Polytechnic and the Ngee Ann Polytechnic are older institutions as they were formed in 1954 and 1981, respectively. The other three polytechnics are of more recent vintage as the Temasek Polytechnic was established on 1 April 1990, followed by the formation of Nanyang Polytechnic on 1 April 1992, and the Republic Polytechnic, which was created on 1 August 2002 and began its operations from July 2003.

In April 1973, the ITB was formed to relate the vocational training of workers to the needs of industry. Thus, the ITB was established to ensure that workers were only trained in those skills that were required by the various industries. It was responsible for administering 12 industrial training institutes which provided full-time and part-time courses in 47 trade areas. However, in April 1979, the AEB, which was responsible for organizing adult education courses, was merged with the ITB to form the VITB, which became the national authority for vocational training and continuing education. The VITB's functions were assumed by the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), which was established on 1 April 1992 as a statutory board to provide pre-employment training to secondary school leavers and continuing education and training to working adults.<sup>8</sup>

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) was established in May 1968 as a regional research center for scholars and specialists interested in the problems of development and modernization in modern Southeast Asia. The Singapore Science Center was formed in December 1977 and the Science Center Board was created to manage it. The final statutory board is the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board, which was set up on 1 April 2004 to "take greater control of the national examination system" by developing and conducting national examinations in Singapore and to provide other examination and assessment services, locally and abroad (Tan, Chow, & Goh, 2008, p. v).

#### *4.4.5. Promotion of Tourism*

The importance of tourism as a means of earning foreign exchange in Singapore is reflected in the fact that 10,116,100 tourists from other countries visited Singapore in 2008. This figure excludes those visitors from Malaysia who arrive by land through the causeway and the second link.<sup>9</sup>

This tremendous increase in the number of tourists during the past three decades is significant as Singapore received her two millionth visitor in December 1978.

The Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) was established in January 1964 to promote tourism by providing information to tourists on Singapore's attractions, hotel accommodation, transport, tours, banking, and money exchange facilities. The STPB also compiled statistics on tourist arrivals. Its strategy for developing the tourist industry in Singapore was based on promoting new attractions and improving the quality of the services provided to tourists. Accordingly, the Sentosa Development Corporation was created in May 1972 to develop and administer Sentosa, an island located half a kilometer south of Singapore, as a pleasure resort for tourists and citizens.

The STPB was renamed as the Singapore Tourist Board (STB) on 19 November 1997 to reflect its expanded role of implementing the national tourism master plan, *Tourism 21: Vision of a Tourism Capital*, which was launched in July 1996.<sup>10</sup> To enhance Singapore's prospects as a major tourist destination in Asia, the PAP government reversed its earlier decision to ban casinos with the development of two integrated resorts with casinos in Marina South and Sentosa. On 2 April 2008, the Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA) was established as a statutory board under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs to administer and enforce the Casino Control Act. More specifically, the CRA performs these three functions:

1. To ensure that the management and operation of a casino is and remains free from criminal influence or exploitation;
2. To ensure that gaming in a casino is conducted honestly; and
3. To contain and control the potential of a casino to cause harm to minors, vulnerable persons, and society at large.<sup>11</sup>

#### *4.4.6. Development of Singapore as a Financial Center*

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) was formed in January 1971 to stimulate the development of Singapore as a financial center. Before 1970, the various monetary functions of a central bank were performed by several government departments and agencies. To streamline these functions, Parliament passed in 1970 the MAS Act, which gives MAS the authority to regulate all elements of monetary, banking and financial aspects of Singapore.<sup>12</sup>

As Singapore's central bank, the MAS's mission is to "promote sustained non-inflationary economic growth, and a sound and progressive financial center." The MAS acts as a central bank as it is responsible for the conduct of monetary policy, the issuance of currency, the oversight of payment systems, and serving as a banker to and financial agent of the government. Second, the MAS also conducts integrated supervision of financial services and financial stability surveillance. Finally, the MAS manages Singapore's official foreign reserves and is also responsible for developing Singapore as an international financial center.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.4.7. *Promotion of Sports and Recreational Activities*

The People's Association (PA) was established in July 1960 to initiate, implement, and coordinate community development programs in Singapore. It caters for the educational and recreational needs of Singaporeans through its network of community centers (now known as community clubs) throughout the island.<sup>14</sup> The PA plays an important role in promoting sports and recreational activities in Singapore as many sporting, cultural, youth, and other recreational and community service organizations are affiliated to it. However, as the PA's *raison d'être* is not the promotion of sports and recreational activities, it is not surprising that there is little coordination of sporting and recreational activities at the national level.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, the Singapore Sports Council (SSC) was formed as a statutory board on 1 October 1973 to promote sports at the national level. To further this objective, the SSC initiated a "sports for all" program by working closely with the Ministry of Education, the Singapore National Olympic Council, the PA, the armed forces, and 47 national sporting associations. In 1976, the government approved the Master Plan on Sports Facilities for 1976–1982 submitted by the SSC. A Sports Facilities Development Committee was appointed to implement the Master Plan, liaise with the relevant organizations, and coordinate the development of the sports facilities envisaged in the Master Plan.

As Singapore's lead agency responsible for developing sports, the SSC's vision is "to create a Sporting Singapore where Sports is a way of life." Its objectives are "to develop sports champions and create enjoyable sporting experiences for Singapore through the three strategic thrusts of cultivating a sporting culture, achieving sports excellence, and creating a vibrant sports industry."<sup>16</sup> On 2 April 2004, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong officially opened the Singapore Sports School, which is a specialized independent

school established to provide “a conducive academic and training environment for teenagers aspiring to be sports athletes.”<sup>17</sup>

#### *4.4.8. Environmental Protection and Public Health*

The National Environmental Agency (NEA) was formed in July 2002 to improve and sustain a green environment in Singapore by developing and implementing environmental programs. To attain its vision of ensuring a sustainable quality environment in Singapore, the NEA has implemented these programs in pollution control, solid waste management, energy efficiency, radiation protection and nuclear safety, prevention and control of vector-borne diseases, public hygiene and cleanliness, management of hawker centers, meteorological services, three P’s (people, public, and private) partnership, and environmental training.<sup>18</sup> By protecting Singapore’s resources from pollution, maintaining a high level of public health and providing timely meteorological information, the NEA has ensured sustainable development and a quality living environment in Singapore for present and future generations.

### **4.5. CASE STUDY OF THE HDB AS AN EFFECTIVE STATUTORY BOARD**

As mentioned earlier, the HDB was the first statutory board established by the PAP leaders in February 1960, eight months after they assumed office in June 1959. The HDB is perhaps the most effective statutory board in Singapore as it has built a total of 1,018,674 housing units and commercial buildings from 1 February 1960 to 31 December 2008 (HDB, 2009, p. 2). Apart from solving the housing shortage in Singapore, the HDB’s success has increased the proportion of the population living in public housing from 9 percent in February 1960 to 82 percent in December 2008 (HDB, 2009, p. 8). Why is the HDB more effective than its predecessor, the SIT, in implementing the public housing program?

#### *4.5.1. Reasons for the SIT’s Failure*

The SIT was established as a statutory board by the British colonial government on 1 July 1927 to “provide for the Improvement of the Town and Island of Singapore.” More specifically, the SIT was responsible for

performing these six functions: (1) the preparation of the General Improvement Plan; (2) the eradication of insanitary buildings; (3) the formulation and implementation of improvement schemes; (4) the provision of housing for those dislocated by improvement schemes; (5) the acquisition and management of land; and (6) the construction of back lanes in slum areas (HDB, 1965, p. 16).

The SIT was created as a town-planning authority and not a public housing authority. This meant that the SIT was not responsible for providing housing for the population but only for those persons who were dislocated by its improvement schemes. The situation changed in 1932, when the SIT was given the power to build by the British colonial government, and it built its first housing units in Lorong Limau during the same year. The housing shortage deteriorated as the private sector did not build sufficient houses to meet the needs of the rapidly growing population.

The serious housing shortage forced the SIT's Board of Trustees to overcome its initial reluctance to provide public housing in favor of "the erection of houses and flats mostly for the poorer classes" (Fraser, 1948, p. 7). The SIT's first housing scheme was the construction of 558 units of artisans' quarters in Lorong Limau from 1932 to 1940. It built Singapore's first public housing estate at Tiong Bahru where 784 flats, 54 tenements, and 33 shops were completed by the SIT from 1936 to 1941 (HDB, 1965, p. 20).

The SIT was compelled by circumstances to assume the formidable task of providing public housing for the lower income groups in Singapore. The SIT's power to build, which was granted in 1932, was later ratified by two committees set up to investigate the housing problem in Singapore. The Weisberg Committee recommended in 1938 that the housing of the poorer classes in the community should be the SIT's responsibility "in view of the urgency of the problem and of the fact that in the [Singapore Improvement] Trust there existed a capable organization which was already carrying out the work required" (Colony of Singapore, 1948, p. 9). This recommendation was reiterated by the Housing Committee of 1947 which further recommended that the SIT "should be brought under much more detailed control by the Treasury and that its staff should provide the nucleus of the larger staff which will be required for the long-term program in a Government Building Authority, with its powers and procedure revised and determined by Statute" (Colony of Singapore, 1948, p. 9).

The SIT failed to solve the housing shortage in Singapore as it was only able to build a total of 23,264 housing units during its 32.5 years of existence. This means that the SIT constructed an average of 716 housing

**Table 4.2.** SIT's Performance in Public Housing (1928–1959).

Year	Number of Housing Units Built
1928	228
1930	142
1931	143
1932	178
1936	103
1937	432
1938	421
1939	180
1940	317
1941	17
1947	420
1948	597
1949	828
1950	1,105
1951	1,307
1952	1,886
1953	2,074
1954	1,908
1955	2,907
1956	1,275
1957	1,344
1958	3,841
1959	1,611
Total	23,264

*Sources:* Compiled from SIT (1960, pp. 49–52) and HDB (1964, pp. 32–33).

units per year during July 1927 to January 1960. Table 4.2 provides details of the SIT's performance in public housing from 1928 to 1959. The SIT did not build every year during its first 14 years (1927–1941) and the number of housing units built ranged from a low of 17 units in 1941 to a peak of 432 units in 1937. There was no construction of housing units during the Japanese Occupation (February 1942 to August 1945) and the British Military Administration (September 1945 to March 1946).

The SIT resumed its building activities in 1947 when it constructed 420 housing units. Indeed, its performance during 1948–1959 improved as it built 20,683 housing units or 89 percent of its total output during that period. Unfortunately, the SIT's improved performance failed to meet the demand for housing generated by the population increase of 640,000 during the same period (Quah, 1975a, pp. 170–172). This meant that excluding the housing units built by the private sector and other public agencies, each new unit

constructed by the SIT had to cater for every increase of 31 persons in Singapore. The high ratio of the total population increase in Singapore to the number of housing units built by the SIT during 1948–1959 is another manifestation of the SIT's failure to solve the housing shortage in Singapore.

The SIT's ineffectiveness in solving the housing shortage can be attributed to the combined effect of the external factors and its internal weaknesses. Singapore's policy context in terms of its geography, economy, population, and politics during 1927–1959 was not conducive to promoting the SIT's organizational effectiveness. The shortage of land forced the architects involved in the public housing program to build high-rise flats as Singapore is also not affected by typhoons or earthquakes. However, the SIT lacked the required resources to exploit these advantages and did not build high-rise flats.

The rapid population growth in Singapore during the SIT's existence increased the demand for public housing. The SIT's inability to cope with the increased demand for public housing resulted in a rash of squatter settlements in those urban and rural areas required for development. The squatters were reluctant to be resettled and the SIT's inability to evict them legally resulted in delays in construction activity in these areas. In short, the squatter problem hindered to a great extent the implementation of the SIT's public housing program.

The SIT's building program was severely handicapped by the shortage of funds, labor, and building materials. The amount of government expenditure on public housing in a country depends on three factors: (1) the government's attitude toward public housing; (2) the extent of the housing shortage; and (3) the availability of financial resources, which depends on the country's level of economic development. From 1927 to 1959, government expenditure on public housing in Singapore was inadequate in spite of the acute housing shortage because of the indifference of the British colonial government toward public housing as well as the economic conditions prevailing in the country at that time. The state of the economy during the same period was not very sound as it was based almost entirely on entrepot trade, and characterized by shortages of skilled labor and capital. Apart from inadequate funds, the SIT's building efforts were also plagued by the scarcity of skilled labor and building materials. Inadequate supplies of steel, roofing tiles, timber, cement, and granite adversely affected the SIT's construction activities.

The political factor was the most important external factor influencing the SIT's failure in public housing as the British colonial government was not committed to solving the housing shortage as reflected in (1) the inadequate funds allocated by it for public housing; (2) delays in obtaining government approval of the SIT's building programs hindered the SIT's progress; and

(3) its strategy of delaying action by appointing committees or commissions to investigate the housing crisis only served to exacerbate the situation as the many recommendations formulated were seldom implemented. The British colonial government's refusal to reorganize or rectify the SIT's weaknesses is another indicator of its lack of interest in solving the housing shortage in Singapore (Quah, 1975a, p. 220).

The SIT's performance in public housing was also adversely affected by its internal weaknesses. Its most serious defect was that its *raison d'être* was not the provision of low-cost public housing as it was originally established in July 1927 as a town planning authority for the improvement of both the town and island of Singapore. This meant that the SIT did not have the legal powers of a public housing authority. The deteriorating housing shortage in Singapore forced the SIT to assume the burden of providing low-cost public housing in 1932. However, the assumption of this additional function was not accompanied by a change in the SIT's powers as it did not have the statutory powers of a public housing authority. Thus, the SIT was the *de facto* and not the *de jure* public housing authority in Singapore from 1932 to January 1960. In sum, the SIT failed to provide adequate public housing for two reasons: (1) it was not formed as a public housing authority and (2) after it was forced by the housing shortage to provide public housing from 1932, it was not given the required legal powers and financial resources by the British colonial government to do so. Hence, under such circumstances, it was not surprising that the SIT was unable to solve the housing shortage.

The SIT's second weakness was that it did not take any measure to ensure that personnel of the highest caliber were recruited. The SIT's recruitment and selection policy was implemented by its agent in London, Peirce and Williams, which adopted a very simple and arbitrary method of recruiting expatriate officers. Expatriate candidates were favored by the SIT and local officers were only recruited by it if Peirce and Williams were unable to recruit the required number of expatriate officers in the United Kingdom. Thus, local officers were only recruited as a last resort, since European applicants were always preferred to local candidates regardless of the latter's qualifications. Furthermore, Peirce and Williams' selection procedures were not stringent enough, and candidates of European descent were sometimes selected even when they exceeded the age limit stipulated or lacked the required qualifications. The SIT's recruitment policy was not based on merit and favored European candidates at the expense of local candidates (Quah, 1975a, pp. 291–295).

The SIT's discriminatory recruitment policy resulted in the domination of the SIT by expatriate officers who were mainly Caucasian, monolingual, and

residents of Singapore for less than five years. Not surprisingly, these expatriate officers faced difficulty in adjusting to the Singapore environment and lacked familiarity with the local conditions. In contrast, the local senior officers were better educated and did not have any problem of adjusting to Singapore. However, the expatriate officers were given preferential treatment in terms of entry to the SIT and higher salaries. The local senior officers were dissatisfied with their lower salaries and unfavorable working conditions and suffered from low morale (Quah, 1975a, pp. 295–296).

The third weakness of the SIT was the prevalence of corruption among some of its officers. Some expatriate senior officers were engaged in corrupt practices with the assistance of some local junior officers in the areas of building contracts, planning and development control, and the Points System of allocating housing units (Quah, 1975a, pp. 281–287). The symbiosis between the expatriate senior officers and the local junior officers resulted from the refusal of the local senior officers to collaborate with their expatriate colleagues in their corrupt activities. The expatriate officers did not approach the local senior officers for fear that the latter would use such incriminating evidence against them. In contrast, the local junior officers were more suitable partners for the expatriate senior officers to co-opt for their corrupt practices as they were poorly paid and less scrupulous, and also more vulnerable because of their junior status. The corrupt activities of some of its officers contributed to the SIT's inefficiency, the wastage of scarce public resources and to a lowering of its overall effectiveness. Furthermore, the SIT's prestige was tarnished when the corrupt practices of its senior expatriate officers and local junior officers were revealed.

Finally, the combined effect of several problems proved to be disastrous for the SIT. Apart from the high population growth rate, which increased the burden of public housing for the SIT, the latter was also plagued by high building costs, public criticism of its policies, legal difficulties in the demolition of insanitary buildings, the squatter problem, and the lack of governmental support (in terms of money spent on public housing).

The SIT's failure to solve the housing shortage in Singapore led to its dissolution by the PAP government and its replacement by the HDB and the Planning Department, which took over the SIT's functions.

#### *4.5.2. Reasons for the HDB's Success*

Unlike the SIT, the HDB is a more effective statutory board because it has succeeded in solving the housing shortage by providing housing for 82

**Table 4.3.** HDB's Performance in Public Housing (1960–2008).

Period	Total Number of Units	Average Building Rate
1960–1965	54,430	9,072
1966–1970	66,239	13,248
1971–1975	113,819	22,764
1976–1980	137,670	27,534
1981–1985	200,377	40,075
1986–1990	121,400	24,280
1991–1995	99,557	19,911
1996–2000	158,621	31,724
2001–2005	55,515	11,103
2006–2008	11,046	3,682
Total	1,018,674	–

Source: HDB (2009, p. 2).

percent of the population. Table 4.3 shows that the HDB has built a total of 1,018,674 housing units and commercial developments from 1960 to 2008.

During its first Five-Year Building Program (1960–1965), the HDB built 54,430 housing units and commercial developments, which exceeded by more than twice the total number of housing units built by the SIT during its entire existence of 32.5 years. It is also obvious from Table 4.3 that the HDB's average building rate has increased from 9,072 units per year during 1960–1965 to a peak of 40,075 units per year during 1981–1985. The HDB's average building rate has declined from 1986 to 2008 mainly because of the reduced demand for public housing as the proportion of the population living in HDB flats has increased from 9 percent in 1960 to 81 percent in 1985 (HDB, 2008, p. 60). Nevertheless, the HDB has continued to build 121,400 units during 1986–1990, 99,557 units during 1991–1995, 158,621 units during 1996–2000, 55,515 units during 2001–2005, and 11,046 units during 2006–2008.

The HDB's impressive performance in public housing can be attributed to the combined effect of the various measures initiated by the PAP government and the HDB itself to ensure successful goal attainment.<sup>19</sup> As the PAP included a low-cost public housing program to solve the housing shortage as part of its platform in the 30 May 1959 general election, it is not surprising that the PAP leaders were committed to fulfilling their electoral promise by providing the HDB with the required financial resources and legislation to implement its public housing program (Fong, 1980, p. 72).

Unlike the SIT, which was established as a town-planning authority, the HDB was created as the *de jure* public housing authority in Singapore. This

means that the HDB's *raison d'être* is the provision of low-cost public housing for Singaporeans. Thus, an important reason for the HDB's success in public housing is that public housing is the original stated and primary organizational goal of the HDB, and not an added and unstated organizational goal as in the SIT's case.<sup>20</sup>

The second reason for the HDB's effectiveness is its ability to capitalize on Singapore's assets and to modify the local policy context to ensure the attainment of its goals. For example, the HDB realized that the absence of earthquakes in Singapore did not prevent the construction of high-rise flats, and it built flats with a maximum of 25 storeys during its first 20 years. In contrast, the SIT built flats of only three or four storeys high. In other words, geography has contributed to the HDB's success by providing the necessary conditions for the construction of low-cost high-rise public housing in Singapore, and the HDB was able to make optimum use of these conditions for the implementation of its public housing program.

Similarly, the HDB responded better to Singapore's economic environment than the SIT. The PAP government's massive allocation of funds to the HDB for public housing enabled the HDB to build on a much larger scale and at a faster pace than the SIT. The availability of government loans for public housing and the rapid growth of the construction industry meant that the HDB was not affected by the two constraints on development experienced by the SIT namely, the scarcity of capital and shortage of building and construction capacity.

A significant difference between the SIT and HDB is that, while both agencies faced the problems of lack of skilled labor, shortage of building materials and higher building costs, only the HDB has initiated several measures to solve these problems. Architects and engineers were recruited by the HDB from abroad to meet the skill shortage. Deserving officers in the HDB were also promoted and a five-year apprenticeship in-service training was introduced by the Ministry of National Development to produce qualified architects. An incentive scheme was initiated in October 1973 to attract those who had completed their national service to join the building industry to meet the need for plasterers and carpenters. The HDB operated two quarries in 1960 to supply the granite required for its building programs. In 1976, the HDB operated two sand quarries to provide the sand needed for its construction activities. The HDB also has a piling plant at Mandai which produces concrete piles, and a brick manufacturing factory in Jurong. Finally, the HDB maintains a modest stockpile of building materials to meet unforeseen shortages to prevent the delay of construction activities.

The third reason for the HDB's success in public housing was its ability to solve the squatter problem, which adversely affected the SIT as it lacked the legal powers to evict squatters and pig farmers from land required for its building activities. The Land Acquisition Act of 1966 provided the HDB with the required legal powers to compulsorily acquire land "for any residential, commercial, or industrial purposes" (Lim, 1968; Koh, 1967).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the successful completion of the first two five-year building programs reduced the housing shortage in Singapore considerably by making available a total of over 120,000 housing units to the population. The HDB also revised its resettlement policy in 1964 and 1971 to provide those persons resettled with attractive compensation rates and benefits. The combined effect of these three factors enabled the HDB to resettle a total of 74,327 families from February 1960 to March 1975 (HDB, 1975, p. 146).

The final reason for the HDB's higher level of organizational effectiveness is the better quality of its personnel and the various measures employed to prevent and reduce corruption in the HDB. Unlike its predecessor, the HDB has adopted a stricter and more elaborate recruitment procedure to ensure that only personnel of the highest caliber and required qualifications are recruited. Recruitment of the HDB's senior staff is based on merit or achievement criteria unlike the SIT which recruited its senior expatriate officers on the basis of the ascriptive criterion of race rather than educational background as European candidates were always preferred even if they were not qualified (Quah, 1975b, p. 148). Furthermore, the recruitment of HDB senior officers adheres closely to the procedure described in the HDB's *Recruitment Section Procedure Manual*, which ensures that candidates applying for jobs with the HDB are treated objectively and impartially. In short, the HDB's recruitment and selection procedures are superior and do not suffer from the same weaknesses of the SIT.

To prevent the occurrence of corrupt practices, the HDB has introduced greater control by revising the contracts procedure and the Chief Architect has ensured strict adherence to the revised contracts procedure by closely supervising the work of senior officers in the Building Department. The HDB has also abolished the SIT's points system of allocating flats because it provided ample opportunities for corruption among those SIT officers administering this system. To prevent corruption and enhance transparency, the HDB introduced a balloting system for allocating flats under the Home Ownership for the People Scheme. The balloting ceremonies are usually presided by the MP for the constituency and widely publicized. All senior appointments to the HDB are screened by three government agencies – the Internal Security Department, Criminal Record Office, and the Corrupt

Practices Investigation Bureau – before letters of appointment are issued to the successful candidates (HDB, 1973, p. 9). The purpose of this security screening is to prevent persons who are internal security risks, criminals, or guilty of corrupt practices in the past, from being recruited by the HDB or any other government agency in Singapore. The HDB's anti-corruption measures also reflect the PAP government's commitment to curb corruption in Singapore as the Prevention of Corruption Act was enacted in June 1960, four months after the HDB was formed.

In sum, the HDB's success in public housing can be attributed to the PAP government's commitment to public housing and the HDB's ability to solve the problems encountered in implementing its public housing program.

#### **4.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has shown that the 63 statutory boards under the jurisdiction of 14 ministries play an important role in Singapore's national development. Their eight functions include the promotion of economic development, the development of infrastructure and essential services, public housing and urban redevelopment, education, promotion of tourism, development of Singapore as a financial centre, promotion of sports and recreational activities, and environmental protection and public health. Unlike their counterparts during the British colonial period, these statutory boards are more effective as they were established by the PAP government to reduce the workload of the SCS by implementing the socio-economic development programs without the constraints faced by the SCS.

As the HDB was the first statutory board established by the PAP government eight months after its assumption of power in June 1959, the HDB's success in solving the serious housing shortage has not only enhanced the PAP government's legitimacy but also vindicated its reinvention and reliance on statutory boards as important instruments for national development. Indeed, the HDB's success in providing public housing for 82 percent of the population, and the EDB's effectiveness in attracting foreign investment have resulted in the proliferation of 63 statutory boards in Singapore today.

Finally, the focus on the HDB as an effective statutory board highlights the important role of the government in ensuring the success or failure of the public housing program. On the one hand, the SIT's failure in public housing was the combined result of the British colonial government's lack of support for the public housing program and the SIT's inefficient recruitment

procedures and prevalence of corruption among some of its senior expatriate officers and local junior officers. In contrast, the PAP government learnt from the mistakes of the British colonial government and provided the HDB with the necessary legislation and funds to implement its public housing program effectively. Similarly, the HDB also avoided the mistakes of the SIT by recruiting qualified personnel and introducing several measures to prevent corruption among its staff.

## NOTES

1. See <http://www.ema.gov.sg>, accessed 7 October 2009.
2. See <http://www.pub.gov.sg>, accessed 7 October 2009.
3. See <http://www.ema.gov.sg>, accessed 7 October 2009.
4. For details of the functions of the MPA, see article 7, section 1, clauses (a)–(q) of the MPA Act of 1996. The text of this legislation is available at <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/>.
5. See “Singapore Telecommunications,” available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singtel>, accessed 8 October 2009.
6. The functions of the CAAS are described in article 6, sections (a)–(i) of the CAAS Act of 1984. See <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg> for details of this Act.
7. See [http://www.lta.gov.sg/corp\\_info/corp\\_abt.htm](http://www.lta.gov.sg/corp_info/corp_abt.htm), accessed 8 October 2009.
8. See [http://www.ite.edu.sg/about\\_ite/corpinfo.htm](http://www.ite.edu.sg/about_ite/corpinfo.htm), accessed 9 October 2009.
9. See “Key Annual Indicators,” available at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html>, accessed 16 October 2009.
10. See <http://app.stb.gov.sg/asp/abo/abo.asp>, accessed 9 October 2009.
11. See <http://www.cra.gov.sg>, accessed 9 October 2009.
12. See [http://www.mas.gov.sg/print/about\\_us/Introduction\\_to\\_MAS.html](http://www.mas.gov.sg/print/about_us/Introduction_to_MAS.html), accessed 9 October 2009.
13. Ibid.
14. For more details on the PA, see Seah (1973).
15. The PA’s objectives of promoting cultural, educational, and athletic activities appear to be non-political in nature. However, the PA’s important role is political as it was established in 1960 to mobilize the support of the rural population by preventing the communists from infiltrating the various grassroots organizations. The PA is responsible for the appointment of all grassroots leaders and provides financial assistance to the residents’ committees. The most important indicator of the PA’s political role is the fact that it is the only statutory board that is chaired by the Prime Minister. See Phua (2000, pp. 11–12, 17–18).
16. See [http://www.ssc.gov.sg/publish/corporate/en/about/About\\_SSC.html](http://www.ssc.gov.sg/publish/corporate/en/about/About_SSC.html), accessed on 20 October 2009.
17. See <http://www.sportsschool.edu.sg/infolinks.aspx?id=1>, accessed on 20 October 2009.
18. See <http://app2.nea.gov.sg/aboutus.aspx>, accessed on 20 October 2009.

19. For a more detailed explanation of the reasons for the HDB's success in public housing, see [Quah \(1975b, pp. 133–149\)](#).

20. For the distinction between stated and unstated organizational goals, see [Cressey \(1958\)](#) and [Catton \(1962\)](#).

21. The Land Acquisition Act, 1966, Section 5 (1).

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# CHAPTER 5

## THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

The job of the PSC does not change. The core job is to maintain an impartial system for recruitment, promotion and dismissal of people in the key jobs in the public service. If you want Singapore to succeed – for any country to succeed – you must have a system that enables the best man and the most suitable to go into the job that needs them. . . . You have got to find the right person to do the job. To do that, you must have an open recruitment system, proper appraisal systems, not just go by word of mouth of some individuals. And, over the years, we have put this in place, and improved our system.

– Lee<sup>1</sup>

In January 2001, the Public Service Commission (PSC) in Singapore celebrated its 50th anniversary. The PSC commissioned a local journalist to prepare a “coffee table” book, which was launched on 21 December 2001 to mark the occasion (Fernandez, 2001; PSC, 2002, pp. 11, 13). In his book, Warren Fernandez analyzes the PSC’s role in attracting and managing top talent in the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) during its first 50 years but he does not provide a detailed evaluation of its role.

The PSC in Singapore has been transformed a great deal during its first 58 years. This chapter focuses on two major changes in the PSC’s role. The first change occurred in April 1982 when the SCS shifted the emphasis of its personnel management philosophy from a task-oriented to an employee-oriented philosophy. The most important consequence of this change is the adoption by the SCS of the Shell performance appraisal system for assessing senior civil servants in October 1983. Second, the increasing workload of the PSC led to the devolution of its functions to the Education Service Commission (ESC) and the Police and Civil Defense Services Commission (PCDSC) in 1990 and the 31 personnel boards in 1995. These two significant changes can be interpreted as attempts by the SCS to adopt useful and relevant techniques from the private sector in order to improve its performance.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the changes in the PSC’s role during its first 58 years and to assess the impact of the PSC’s role in Singapore. The

next section provides a detailed analysis of the PSC's origins by describing the developments that led to its formation. The second section focuses on the PSC's role and its evolution from 1951 to 1989. The third section analyzes the adoption of the Shell performance appraisal system by the SCS in 1983. The fourth section examines the devolution of the PSC's recruitment and promotion functions in 1990 to the ESC and the PCDSC and in 1995 to the 31 personnel boards. The fifth section assesses the impact of the PSC's role in Singapore. The final section contends that the PSC's special treatment of the scholar bureaucrats has led to two unintended consequences: low morale of the non-scholar bureaucrats and the arrogance of the scholar bureaucrats.

## 5.1. ORIGINS OF THE PSC

The origins of the PSC in Singapore can be traced to the White Paper (Command Paper no. 197) entitled *Organization of the Colonial Service* issued by the British government in 1946.<sup>2</sup> Command Paper No. 197 stressed that progress toward self-government could only be achieved if the public services of the colonies were adapted to local conditions and staffed to the maximum possible extent by local people. More importantly, it recommended the establishment of PSCs in the colonies to ensure that qualified local candidates would be recruited into the public services.

In 1947, the Trusted Commission recommended that a PSC should be created to handle matters affecting the public services in the Malayan Union and Singapore. It also recommended that the PSC should be staffed by a specially selected officer and another officer who had worked in the Education Department. Thirdly, the Trusted Commission recommended that the PSC should have direct access to the Governors as it would take over the duties of the Malayan Establishment Office and the Service Branches of the Secretariats (*Malayan Union and Singapore, 1947, pp. 12–13, para. 109–112*).

The Trusted Commission's recommendation to establish a PSC was welcomed by the local civil servants for they hoped that its formation would lead to the gradual localization of the civil service (*Dass, 1961, p. 19*). However, the British colonial government did nothing until N.A. Mallal, a Progressive Party member in the Singapore Legislative Council, raised the matter in the Council on 18 May 1948. Three decisions were made during that Council meeting: (1) a PSC should be established at an early date to take over all appointments and promotions affecting the public services of

Singapore and the Federation of Malaya; (2) a Select Committee should be appointed to examine and report on the constitution and terms of reference of a PSC; and (3) the Legislative Council of the Federation of Malaya should be asked to appoint a similar Select Committee, and both of these Committees should submit a joint report on the PSC to both Councils (*Colony of Singapore, 1951, pp. B. 50–51*).

The Select Committee on the PSC in Singapore submitted its own report to the British colonial government on 15 March 1949 as there were no discussions with its counterpart appointed by the Federation of Malaya Council. The Select Committee made five recommendations:

1. A PSC should be established “to control appointments and promotions and the flow of candidates” to staff the vacant positions in the Colony;
2. To enable the PSC to deal with every post in the Colony, the “agreement for the constitution of the Malayan Establishment insofar as Singapore is concerned should be terminated”;
3. A separate Singapore Establishment should be formed to embrace all posts in the Colony, regardless of “whether they are reserved for the Unified Colonial Services or not,” and the Establishment Officer should be appointed as the PSC’s Secretary;
4. The PSC will be an advisory body with a statutory and independent character; and
5. An Ordinance for creating a PSC and specifying its functions should be enacted (*Colony of Singapore, 1951, p. C. 249*).

The British colonial government accepted the first and fourth recommendations unreservedly, the fifth recommendation in principle, and rejected the second and third recommendations. The Colonial Secretary explained at length why the government rejected the second and third recommendations. There were three reasons why these recommendations would, in the long run, militate against the interests of the senior officers in the public service. First, the formation of a smaller and separate Singapore Establishment would be disadvantageous as those recruited would not enjoy the advantages offered by the larger Malayan Establishment. Second, it would be difficult to abolish the Malayan Establishment as Singapore was only one of the signatories to the agreement, and the consent of the officers was needed before it could be dissolved. Third, regardless of the existence of the Malayan Establishment, the number of posts in the public services in Singapore for the PSC to fill would remain the same (*Colony of Singapore, 1951, p. B. 223*).

He added that the suggestion in the third recommendation that the senior posts in the Colony were reserved for members of the Unified Colonial Services was not true. To prevent further misunderstanding of the government's intention, he tabled a White Paper on Recruitment which emphasized that the senior positions in the administration would be reserved for local officers. In short, the Colonial Secretary sought a compromise by proposing before the Singapore Legislative Council that a PSC should be established for Singapore only and without breaking away from the Malayan Establishment.

The Bill creating the PSC was introduced in the Singapore Legislative Council on 26 June 1949 and received its third reading on 20 December 1949. An interim Commission-designate was established in May 1950 and it worked according to the provisions of the PSC Ordinance No. 55 of 1949. The Colonial Secretary explained that the aim of the interim-Commission-designate was "to deal with any applications from persons of local domicile who wish to be considered for entering the Unified Colonial Services" during the interim period (Colony of Singapore, 1951, p. B. 227).

During the interim period, an office and staff were acquired and organized and the Commission-designate established methods of conducting its business which worked satisfactorily and were adopted *in toto* by the PSC in 1951. Moreover, the Commission-designate also dealt with the many "teething" problems that arose and laid down guidelines for dealing with these problems. The interim period lasted for seven months, and the Commission-designate was replaced by the PSC on 1 January 1951.

## 5.2. EVOLUTION OF THE PSC'S ROLE, 1951–1989

The PSC is the adapted version of the United Kingdom's Civil Service Commission in the former British colonies and was established to insulate the civil service from politics and to accelerate its localization (Sinker, 1953, p. 206; Quah, 1974, p. 356). Similarly, the PSC in Singapore was established on 1 January 1951 to "keep politics out of the SCS and to accelerate the latter's pace of localization" (Quah, 1982b, p. 50). The second objective is no longer important as the localization of the SCS was completed with the attainment of self-government in Singapore in June 1959. However, the primary aim of keeping politics out of the SCS remains relevant as the purpose of the PSC's program as stated in the national budget is "to meet the staffing requirements of the government in accordance with the merit principle" (Republic of Singapore, 1980, p. 78).

The PSC's evolution can be divided into three stages: (1) 1951–1982, when it was the major public personnel agency in Singapore; (2) 1983–1989, when the Public Service Division (PSD) was created to formulate and review personnel policies in the SCS to ensure that these policies would be implemented consistently in all the ministries; and (3) 1990 to the present, when the PSC's functions of recruitment and promotion were devolved to the ESC and PCDSC in 1990 and the 31 personnel boards in 1995. The first two stages will be discussed in this section and, as indicated earlier, the third stage will be analyzed in the fourth section.

### *5.2.1. Stage I (1951–1982)*

The PSC is the gate-keeper to the SCS because it controls the quality of personnel entering the SCS by “keeping the rascals out” and attracting the most qualified candidates to apply for civil service positions (Quah, 1982b, p. 51). Following the recommendation of the Trusted Commission of 1947, the SCS was divided into four divisions according to their functions and educational qualifications, with Division I officers being honors year university graduates, Division II officers being general degree university graduates, Division III officers requiring a secondary school education, and Division IV officers requiring only a primary school education. During its first 31 years, the PSC's major function was the recruitment and selection of candidates for Divisions I and II appointments as Division III appointments and promotions from Divisions III to II were handled by selection boards appointed by it. Division IV appointments were selected by the relevant ministries and departments, but those selected must be approved by the PSC (Quah, 1996a, p. 494).

The PSC has relied solely on interviews to select qualified candidates for the SCS. To be eligible for appointment to the SCS, a candidate must fulfil these six criteria: citizenship, age, educational qualification, experience, medical fitness, and good character (i.e., no criminal conviction). In other words, the PSC upholds meritocracy in Singapore by ensuring fair play and impartiality in recruiting and selecting candidates for appointments to Divisions I and II on the basis of merit. Similarly, civil servants are promoted by the PSC on the basis of official qualifications, experience, and merit. Eligible candidates for promotion are interviewed by the PSC members and selection boards (Quah, 1996a, p. 494).

The PSC's gate-keeping role is very important because of the multi-racial nature of Singapore's population. In June 2008, the resident population of

3,642,700 in Singapore consists of 74.7 percent Chinese, 13.6 percent Malays, 8.9 percent Indians, and 2.8 percent Others (Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 26, Table 3.4). The PSC maintains an impartial personnel system by ensuring that all the different ethnic groups, especially the minorities, receive equal treatment in the SCS. Members of the PSC are selected from the various races and the PSC treats all “ethnic groups equally by ensuring that only suitably qualified candidates can gain entry into the SCS” (Kang, 1988, p. 25). Thus, in spite of the diversity of ethnic groups, languages and religions in Singapore, candidates are selected and promoted in the SCS on the basis of capability and not on the basis of their ethnic group, language spoken, religious affiliation, or sex. In other words, the SCS does not have an affirmative action program (Quah, 1989a, p. 133).

The PSC in 1951 consisted of three members and a small secretariat of nine persons to assist the members to perform their duties. In 1961, the PSC assumed responsibility for the disciplinary control of all civil servants from the Establishment Branch of the Ministry of Finance (PSC, 1964, p. 2), and for interviewing and selecting candidates for all scholarships, fellowships and training courses offered or sponsored by the government (Quah, 1996a, p. 495). Needless to say, these two additional functions increased the PSC’s workload considerably. For example, in 1969, the PSC and the selection boards interviewed a total of 21,734 candidates or an average of 72 candidates per working day for appointments and promotions (PSC, 1970, p. 2). Consequently, the number of PSC members was increased from 3 to 10 and the size of the PSC secretariat was also increased from 9 to 286 persons during 1951–1982 (PSC, 1983, p. 1).

### *5.2.2. Stage II (1983–1989)*

The PSD was established on 3 January 1983 for two reasons. The first reason was the tremendous increase in the PSC’s workload during 1951–1982. For example, the number of candidates interviewed by the PSC members and selection boards for appointments and promotions increased by nearly 19 times from 556 candidates in 1951 to 10,430 candidates in 1982 (PSC, 1954, p. 2, 1983, p. 5). Similarly, the number of disciplinary cases completed has also risen from 24 to 169 during 1957–1982 (PSC, 1959, p. 8, 1983, p. 18). A third indicator of the PSC’s heavier workload is the rapid growth in the number of scholarships and training awards granted from 23 in 1963 to 847 in 1982 (PSC, 1964, pp. 9 and 19, 1983, p. 8). Finally, a comparative study of the workloads of the PSCs in Singapore and Ceylon

(now known as Sri Lanka) during 1964–1967 shows that the PSC in Singapore interviewed 58,712 applicants during this period, or nine times more than the 6,485 candidates interviewed by the PSC in Ceylon (Quah, 1971, p. 140). In short, as the growth in size of both the PSC members and the secretariat was inadequate to cope with the increased workload, the government created another organization – the PSD – to help the PSC cope with its onerous burden.

A second and more important reason for forming the PSD was the sharing of the personnel management functions between the PSC and several agencies. Before 1972, the PSC shared the personnel functions with the Establishment Division of the Ministry of Finance, which was responsible for all civil service personnel matters not handled by the PSC. From 1972 to 1980, the personnel management functions in the SCS were dealt with by the PSC (which was responsible for recruitment, selection, promotion, training, transfer, disciplinary control, and dismissal), the Establishment Unit of the Prime Minister's Office (which dealt with the career development and training of senior civil servants) and the Personnel Administration Branch (PAB) of the Budget Division in the Ministry of Finance (which took care of job classification and terms and conditions of service) (Lee, 1980, pp. 442–443). In April 1981, the function of career development and training of senior civil servants was transferred from the Establishment Unit to the PSC.

In April 1982, the government revised the salaries in the SCS to reduce the gap between earnings in the public and private sectors. During the same month, the government also announced its intention to change the SCS's personnel management philosophy to an employee-centred one, which would provide civil servants with a sense of commitment and the opportunity to develop themselves to their fullest potential. This change in personnel management philosophy would enable the PSC to attract, motivate, and retain talented individuals (Quah, 1984c, p. 302).

Accordingly, a Personnel Management Steering Committee (PMSC) led by the PSC Chairman was appointed to implement the new philosophy in the SCS. The PMSC focused on these five aspects: recruitment, training, career development, succession planning, and matching the right person with the right job.<sup>3</sup> The PMSC requested the Management Services Department (MSD) to review the role and functions of the PSC and PAB to ascertain whether better direction and control of the SCS's personnel policies could be attained. The MSD found that while the PSC and PAB had consulted each other on a continuing basis, the sharing of the different personnel functions between them had caused these problems: divided

policy direction of their roles, functions and authority; duplication of work; inadequate coordination; and inefficient use of manpower (Quah, 1988b, pp. 64–65).

Policy direction and responsibilities were divided, as the PSC was responsible for the career development and training of senior civil servants while the PAB was concerned with personnel matters affecting those in Divisions II, III, IV, and the daily rated employees. The second problem was the ambiguous definition of the roles, functions, and authority of the PSC and PAB in training, secondment, no-pay leave, and schemes of service. This ambiguity led to uncertainty and confusion among the staff of these two agencies regarding their actual responsibilities and authority. Thirdly, there was duplication of work, as unnecessary referrals to the PSC by the PAB for comments and agreement meant that the same case would have been examined by officers in both agencies. Fourthly, inadequate coordination between the PSC and PAB had resulted in lack of awareness of each other's plans and activities in training, and had also adversely affected the recruitment and retention of officers in certain schemes of service. Finally, as a result of the above problems, there was an inefficient use of manpower in the PSC, the PAB, and those ministries and departments which had dealings with them (Quek, 1983, p. 2).

In view of these problems, the MSD recommended the creation of a separate central authority, which would be known as the PSD, to formulate and review personnel policies in the SCS and to ensure that these policies are implemented consistently in the various ministries. The PSD would be responsible for all personnel policy matters concerning appraisal, posting, training, schemes of service, service conditions, and welfare. It would also provide such central personnel services as conducting pay research and administering the holiday bungalow scheme. All the functions performed by the PAB except those related to appointment, promotion, and disciplinary control would be entrusted to the PSD. This means that the PSC's role would be restricted to that of ensuring impartiality in the appointment, promotion, and disciplinary control of civil servants, as stated in the Constitution. The MSD further recommended that the Deputy Secretary of the PSD should also serve as the PSC Secretary in order to enhance cooperation and coordination between the PSC and PSD (Quek, 1983, p. 3).

Thus, on 3 January 1983, the PSD was formed as the third division within the Ministry of Finance and the functions of personnel management in the SCS are now shared between the PSD and PSC.

### **5.3. THE ADOPTION OF THE SHELL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM IN THE SCS**

The SCS used the Staff Confidential Report (SCR) to evaluate civil servants annually during 1966–1979. The SCR was administered by the Establishment Unit of the Prime Minister’s Office and it relied on such traditional methods of performance appraisal as weighted checklists, graphic rating scales, and descriptive essays (Lum, 1992, p. 18). The SCR required the administrators to evaluate the leadership, conduct, responsibility, oral expression, reaction to pressure, overall performance, fitness for promotion, and future development of their subordinates (Lum, 1992, pp. 18–19). It was used to reward deserving employees and to identify personnel with the potential for assuming high office (Yeo, 1982, p. 9). The SCR was replaced by the Staff Performance Report (SPR) in 1980 (Lum, 1992, p. 22).

In 1982, a survey of 40 senior and mid-level civil servants found that the respondents were dissatisfied with three aspects of performance appraisal in the SCS. First, there was a lack of objectivity in performance evaluation because of the reliance on personal traits as a performance measure. Second, feedback was not provided on appraisal results as the SCR was a closed reporting system. Finally, there was also no emphasis on career development (Lim, 1982, pp. 11–12). The need to redress these weaknesses contributed to the reform of the personnel management system and the SCR, which was initiated in 1981 with the invitation of personnel experts from Shell London to conduct introductory talks on Shell’s personnel management system (Lum, 1992, p. 20).

In February 1982, a team of senior civil servants from Singapore visited Shell London to study its personnel management system. Shell London was selected because “it is a large and successful organization with an established reputation of having an effective personnel management system”.<sup>4</sup> In his memoirs, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew revealed that he had “checked with corporate leaders of MNCs [multinational corporations] how they recruited and promoted their senior people, and decided [that] one of the best systems was that developed by Shell, the Anglo-Dutch company” (Lee, 2000b, p. 740). He added that “After trying out the system and finding it practical and reliable, I adopted it for our public service in 1983, replacing the British system we had inherited” (Lee, 2000b, p. 741). The study team recommended the improvement of the management of civil servants in Singapore by adapting Shell’s personnel management policies, including its system of appraising performance.

Shell's focus on identifying the long-term potential of its employees was "deemed worthy of emulation due to its perceived applicability to the SCS and emphasis on personnel development" (Lum, 1992, p. 21).

As mentioned in the previous section, the PMSC was formed in April 1982 to adapt Shell's system of personnel management to the SCS's requirements. Accordingly, the SPR, which was subjective and trait-based, was replaced in October 1983 as it could not assess the potential of civil servants. The new appraisal system consisted of three components: a revised SPR; a Staff Development Report (SDR); and the potential ranking exercise (PRE), which was based on the Shell system (Lum, 1992, pp. 23 and 25).

The revised SPR is an adapted version of that used by Shell and is "a record of the discussion between a reporting officer and his subordinate on the latter's performance during the period under review as well as a plan of action for the ensuing year." It has several sections which provide information on the personal data on the subordinate, the review of his performance during the previous year according to the targets set, the extenuating circumstances affecting his performance, and issues dealt with during the discussion such as the officer's posting preferences and training and information provided on his general potential and possible next posting (Lum, 1992, pp. 26–28).

Similarly, the SDR, which is a confidential record of a civil servant's potential as assessed by his superiors, is adopted from a similar report used by Shell (Lum, 1992, p. 29). The subordinate's potential is evaluated by his superior in terms of his possession of the four "HAIR" qualities of Helicopter, Analysis, Imagination, and Reality. These qualities were developed by J. Van Lennep and Herman Muller, who were commissioned by Shell Petroleum International to devise a new appraisal system to replace Shell's "ageing and increasingly inadequate" system.<sup>5</sup> The officer's short-term potential is based on the likelihood of his promotion to the next grade. His long-term potential is measured as the currently estimated potential (CEP), which "is the current estimate of the highest level at which an administrator can finally be expected to perform successfully, assuming unlimited opportunities" (Lum, 1992, p. 30, fn. 43).

The SPR and SDR are administered during October to December of every year. However, the PRE is conducted separately during the latter part of every year. The PRE is adopted fully from Shell and is based on "the traditional method of rank ordering where administrators are ranked against their colleagues in accordance with the HAIR and threshold qualities" in order to obtain a CEP grading for each administrator for career planning and manpower development (Lum, 1992, p. 32). The CEP grades

for an officer obtained from the PRE and SDR are treated as tentative and will only be considered as accurate if his CEP is consistent over several years. The panel conducting the PRE consists of between 3 to 10 senior officers, depending on the number of civil servants being ranked, which varies from 12 to 50. An officer being evaluated must be known by at least two appraisers on the panel for four years (Lum, 1992, p. 32). Members of the panel must ensure that the ranking is “fair, that all views are considered and that the prescriptive definition of each quality is understood and adhered to” (Lum, 1992, p. 34).

In short, the SCS adopted the Shell system of performance appraisal in 1983 as the SPR evaluates an officer’s performance in terms of his level of efficiency and effectiveness, and the SDR and PRE are concerned with determining his CEP by examining his HAIR qualities (Lum, 1992, p. 35).

In 1996, 13 years after its introduction in the SCS, major changes were introduced to the Shell system of performance appraisal. The SCS’s current appraisal system involves the joint completion of a Work Review Report by the officer and his supervisor on their views on the officer’s achievements and progress during the year under review. The supervisor will identify areas for possible improvement for the officer and discuss with him the work targets and training plans for the next year (PSD, 1998, p. 7).

In addition, the supervisor has to complete a confidential Development Report to evaluate the officer’s overall performance and long-term potential annually. The officer’s performance is assessed on the basis of these eight criteria: teamwork, work output, quality of work, organizational ability, reaction under stress, sense of responsibility, service quality, and knowledge and application. Officers are graded on their performance in these areas in terms of five grades: A, B, C, D, and E. A grade “D” means that the officer is performing at the level required of his current position, but a grade “E” is unacceptable as the officer cannot meet the requirements of his current position (PSD, 1998, p. 3).

The officer’s potential is assessed by means of the concept of CEP, or “an estimation of the highest appointment or level of work, an officer can handle competently before his retirement.” (PSD, 1998, p. 4.)<sup>6</sup> For Division I and II officers, the CEP is assessed by examining an officer’s helicopter quality (defined as “the ability and drive to look at a problem from a higher vantage point with simultaneous attention to relevant details”) and his whole person qualities such as intellectual qualities (power of analysis, imagination, and sense of reality), results orientation (achievement motivation, political sensitivity, and decisiveness), and leadership qualities (capacity to motivate, delegation, and communication) (PSD, 1998, pp. 4–5). An officer’s

helicopter quality defines his limits in terms of his intellect and sets the ceiling on his CEP. In contrast, his whole person qualities decide whether he could attain his CEP given his personality, character, and abilities. For Division III officers, the assessment of their CEP is simplified by focusing on their intellectual qualities, adaptability, and versatility, results orientation and supervisory qualities (PSD, 1998, p. 5).

A final change is the introduction of the key appointment likelihood (KAL) which assesses an officer's ability to occupy a key appointment as defined for his scheme of service. KAL is a useful way for describing further an officer's potential for such key appointments as a permanent secretary or school principal. The assessment of an officer's KAL has three benefits: it sharpens CEP assessments; it allows ministries to distinguish officers within the same CEP; and it identifies more clearly officers for succession planning (PSD, 1998, p. 6).

#### **5.4. DEVOLUTION OF THE PSC'S RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION FUNCTIONS**

The third stage of the PSC's evolution began in 1990 with the devolution of its recruitment and promotion functions to the ESC and PCDSC. The creation of these two agencies was not only a response to the PSC's heavy workload, but also an attempt to make the SCS more effective in competing with the private sector for talented personnel.

In 1983, the PSC had delegated to permanent secretaries and department heads its authority to recruit Division IV officers and to confirm officers in all the four divisions. However, in spite of this delegation, the PSC's workload increased tremendously during 1983–1989. Table 5.1 shows that the PSC and the selection boards considered a total of 50,274 candidates for appointments and promotions from 1983 to 1989. During the same period, the PSC dealt with 1,148 disciplinary cases and granted 1,543 scholarships and training awards.

In March 1990, the Constitution of Singapore was amended to help the PSC cope with its heavy workload by increasing its membership from 11 to 15, including the chairman, and by creating two new sub-commissions – the ESC for education and the PCDSC for the police and civil defense services. According to the then Minister for Finance, Richard Hu, that move was intended to “ease the current heavy workload borne by individual members, as well as to further improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of civil service personnel management.” He also admitted that the government had

**Table 5.1.** Workload of the PSC in Singapore (1983–1989).

Year	Candidates Considered for Appointments and Promotions	Disciplinary Cases Completed	Scholarships and Training Awards Granted
1983	8,738	156	231
1984	6,933	161	173
1985	10,402	153	175
1986	6,414	174	215
1987	5,690	184	250
1988	5,512	154	238
1989	6,585	166	261
Total	50,274	1,148	1,543

Source: Compiled from data provided in PSC (1984–1990).

encountered difficulty in recruiting suitable candidates to serve on the PSC as it had “difficulty coping with its heavy workload, with members spending an average of 100 afternoons per year on commission matters” (*Straits Times*, 30 March 1990, p. 27).<sup>7</sup>

As the ESC would be responsible for more than 21,000 teachers and the PCDSC would deal with more than 10,000 police, narcotics, prisons, and civil defense officers, the PSC would be left with the remaining 34,000 civil servants. The Finance Minister concluded his parliamentary speech by stressing that the formation of the two sub-commissions would “not only improve the image and staff morale of the services involved but also lead to more responsive personnel management” in the SCS (*Straits Times*, 30 March 1990, p. 27). Accordingly, on 16 August 1990, teachers in the Education Service, police officers of the rank of Inspector and above, and other officers in the Police and Civil Defense Services came under the purview of the ESC and PCDSC, respectively.

In January 1990, the PSC delegated to the permanent secretaries its authority to promote Division III officers from grade B to grade A in the various ministries (PSC, 1994, p. 21). It further delegated its authority to permanent secretaries in 1992 to promote Divisions I, II, and III officers from the basic recruitment grade to the first promotion grade in 41 services according to stipulated guidelines and procedures. Accordingly, in 1992, the permanent secretaries promoted 429 officers consisting of 88 Division I officers, 110 Division II officers, and 231 Division III officers. The ministries had also recommended 2,087 officers in Divisions I to III to the PSC for promotion, of whom 1,314 candidates were selected (PSC, 1993, p. 15). From 1 September 1992, the PSC delegated its authority to recruit officers

to Division III appointments to the permanent secretaries. Consequently, the ministries recruited 241 Division III officers and 420 Division IV officers in 1992 (PSC, 1993, p. 5).

Thus, apart from reducing its heavy workload, the rationale for the PSC's delegation of its authority to the permanent secretaries of the above functions was to give the SCS "greater flexibility and responsiveness to external market factors" (PSC, 1993, p. 15). This second aim has assumed more importance in recent years and contributed to a great extent to the formation of the 31 personnel boards in January 1995. During June–December 1993, the PSC encouraged the ministries to initiate recruitment exercises for Divisions I and II appointments. Thirteen ministries took part and selected 173 candidates for Divisions I and II posts (PSC, 1993, p. 3). These moves resulted in the reduction of the PSC's workload in 1993, as Table 5.2 shows that the number of candidates selected for appointments dropped to 1,289, and only 938 officers were considered for promotion during that year. In 1994, the number of candidates selected for appointments was further reduced to 1,263, but the number of officers considered for promotion increased to 1,146.

The creation of the ESC and PCDCS has reduced the PSC's workload to some extent as it is no longer concerned with the recruitment and promotion of teachers, police officers and civil defense officers. However, if the PSC's workload in selecting candidates from 1990 to 1994 is compared with the workloads of the ESC and PCDCS during the same period, it can be seen from Table 5.3 that the PSC has done the most work (67.4 percent), followed by the ESC (28.7 percent), and the PCDCS (3.9 percent).

On 22 April 1994, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong informed senior civil servants attending the Administrative Service dinner that the government

**Table 5.2.** Workload of the PSC in Singapore (1990–1994).

Year	Candidates Considered for Appointments	Officers Considered for Promotion	Disciplinary Cases Completed	Scholarships and Training Awards Given
1990	2,604	2,009	95	246
1991	2,602	2,290	127	228
1992	2,235	2,087	147	271
1993	1,289	938	121	244
1994	1,263	1,146	107	218
Total	9,993	8,470	597	1,207

*Source:* Compiled from data provided in PSC (1991–1995).

**Table 5.3.** Workloads of the PSC, ESC, and PCDSC in selecting candidates to the SCS (1990–1994).

Year	PSC	ESC	PCDSC	Total
1990	2,604	655	30	3,289
1991	2,602	6	102	2,710
1992	2,235	1,160	139	3,534
1993	1,289	1,272	147	2,708
1994	1,263	1,161	155	2,579
Total	9,993	4,254	573	14,820
Percentage	67.4	28.7	3.9	100.0

Source: Compiled from data provided in PSC (1991–1995).

would be restructuring the centralized public personnel management system in Singapore to enable the SCS to compete more effectively with the private sector to attract and retain talented personnel. He elaborated the rationale for doing so:

We inherited the present civil service personnel from the British colonial government. The provisions in the Constitution are 40 years old. They were designed for entirely different circumstances. . . . Personnel management was highly centralized. Authority for recruitment, promotion, and discipline was vested in an independent Public Service Commission. . . . which managed the whole civil service. . . . But in the circumstances then prevailing the system did work, and had its advantages. It maintained uniform and reliable standards throughout the service, ensured the integrity and impartiality of the civil service, and provided a workable distribution of manpower within the public sector.

The situation in the 1990s is totally different. . . . The private sector now offers a wide range of attractive and challenging jobs. . . . Far from being the primary or most sought after employer, *the civil service has in recent years had continual difficulty recruiting and retaining the talent it needs.* . . . In these changed circumstances, the civil service personnel management system has serious shortcomings. *The centralized system is too inflexible to adopt the varying demands and circumstances of individual services. It over-emphasizes relativities and uniformity of treatment. Too many layers of bureaucracy prevent us from properly rewarding and retaining outstanding officers. Promotions have not kept pace with expectations . . .*

*The basic problem is that the civil service separates authority from responsibility.* This contradicts the basic management principle that managers should be given the wherewithal to accomplish their mission. . . . [Unlike Chief Executive Officers in private organizations,] in the civil service, permanent secretaries have no final authority over recruitment, promotions, deployment or advancement. The PSC and PSD, which do, are not responsible for the performance of individual ministries or of the government. This separation is meant to safeguard the integrity of the service, but goes well beyond what is necessary for this purpose.

*The grave consequence of this fundamental flaw is the continuing loss of talent to the private sector. ... But, despite the best efforts of all those involved in civil service personnel management, the results are not satisfactory because the system itself has been found wanting. (Goh, 1994, pp. 7–11, emphasis added)*

Prime Minister Goh further cautioned that the SCS's personnel management system had to be reformed "without compromising the high standards, integrity and impartiality of the civil service." Referring to the successful experiences of decentralizing the personnel management systems of the civil services in Britain, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, he recommended that Singapore should follow their examples by decentralizing personnel management in the SCS by devolving authority from the PSC to the permanent secretaries and ministries. He ended his speech by reminding the senior civil servants that decentralization meant "giving more responsibility to line managers, faster promotions for good officers, but also swifter retribution for those who under-perform" (Goh, 1994, pp. 13, 16).

The above changes were implemented by amending the Constitution to enable the President, acting on the Prime Minister's advice, to devolve specified powers of the PSC, ESC, and PCDCS to a system of personnel boards consisting of civil servants to recruit, promote and discipline officers. The constitutional amendments were passed by Parliament on 25 August 1994 and resulted in the creation of a system of 31 personnel boards at three levels to take over the recruitment and promotion of the following officers from the PSC, ESC, and PCDCS in January 1995:

1. A special personnel board of four members to deal with all administrative service officers at superscale E1 and below;
2. Six senior personnel boards consisting of 21 members to handle all Division I officers below superscale status; and
3. Twenty-four personnel boards made up of 103 members to take charge of Divisions II, III, and IV officers (PSD, 1994, p. 1).

The special personnel board consists of these four members who have been appointed by the President for two years: the Head of the SCS (Chairman), the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS), the Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, and the Permanent Secretary (Finance). The composition of the six personnel boards, which consists of six members each, varies according to the ministries and agencies under their purview. Each senior personnel board is chaired by an appointed permanent secretary and consists of the other permanent secretaries of the ministries covered by it. There are 21 members for the six senior personnel boards as eight members serve on more than one

board (PSD, 1994, pp. 2, 4). The ministries have also formed personnel boards to handle Divisions II, III, and IV officers in their schemes of services. Each personnel board is chaired by a superscale officer under the permanent secretary, and consists of between two to four members, who are Division I officers, including one from the PSD. For the larger ministries, several personnel boards have been established (Tan, 1994, p. 5).

To ensure their smooth functioning, the 31 personnel boards are required to follow these four principles:

1. Promotion and advancement will continue to be based on merit;
2. Personnel boards must be able to exercise authority fairly and consistently;
3. The selection of members of personnel boards must be rigorous and stringent to preserve impartiality and high standards; and
4. Civil servants aggrieved by the decisions of the personnel boards can appeal to the PSC, ESC, and PCDSC (Tan, 1994, p. 3).

With the devolution of their authority to recruit and promote civil servants to the system of personnel boards, the PSC, ESC, and PCDSC remain in charge of these functions:

1. Recruitment to the Administrative Service and the Administrative Service (Foreign Service Branch);
2. Promotion of all officers to Superscale D and above;
3. Award of undergraduate scholarships; and
4. Disciplinary cases and appeals: the PSC, ESC, and PCDSC are the final authority for appeals (Tan, 1994, pp. 2–3).

Table 5.4 describes the structure of the SCS’s decentralized system of personnel management in terms of the various agencies and their

**Table 5.4.** Structure of the SCS’s Personnel Management System in 1995.

Organizations	Responsibilities
PSC, ESC, PCDSC	Superscale officers D and above
Special Personnel Board (4 members)	Superscale officers up to E1 and Timescale administrative officers
6 Senior Personnel Boards (21 members)	Division I officers below superscale status
24 Personnel Boards (103 members)	Divisions II, III and IV Officers

Source: Quah (1996a, p. 502), Fig. 48a.

responsibilities in 1995. In 1995, the PSC delegated its authority to confirm or extend the probationary period of parliamentary officers and Division I officers in the Auditing Service; and its authority to promote Division I officers in the Auditing Service up to Auditor Grade III to the Auditor-General and the Clerk of Parliament (PSC, 1998, p. 14). However, the PSC, ESC, and PCDC were amalgamated into a single PSC on 1 April 1998 (PSC, 1999, p. 9).

No official reason was given for this reversal of the 1990 decision. The creation of the ESC and PCDC in August 1990 was designed to reduce the PSC's workload by removing from its jurisdiction more than 31,000 teachers and police and civil defense officers. However, in spite of this change, the PSC's workload during 1990–1994 was still heavy as Table 5.3 shows that the PSC was still responsible for selecting 9,993 candidates (67.4 percent) of the 14,820 candidates selected by all the three agencies. On the other hand, the PSC's workload was reduced considerably by the introduction of the system of personnel boards in January 1995 as can be seen from Table 5.5. In short, the ESC and PCDC were dissolved in April 1998 as they were ineffective in lowering the PSC's workload.

**Table 5.5.** Workload of the PSC in Singapore (1995–2008).

Year	Candidates Considered for Appointment	Officers Considered for Promotion	Disciplinary Cases Completed	Scholarships and Training Awards Given
1995	70	45	83	231
1996	47	17	33	231
1997	53	16	45	214
1998	71	21	34	257
1999	96	24	37	332
2000	126	28	52	258
2001	126	9	59	253
2002	134	7	56	74
2003	175	17	52	50
2004	165	13	60	34
2005	192	18	52	49
2006	116	13	31	39
2007	203	18	30	57
2008	102	23	55	72
Total	1,676	269	679	2,151

Source: Compiled from PSC (1996–2009).

## 5.5. THE IMPACT OF THE PSC

The British ruled Singapore for nearly 140 years, from its founding by Stamford Raffles in January 1819 to its attainment of self-government in June 1959. The legacy of British colonial rule was threefold. First, the British colonial government introduced meritocracy through the establishment of the PSC in January 1951. Second, this tradition of meritocracy was reinforced by the commitment to clean government through the introduction of the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance in 1937 and the creation of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau in 1952. Finally, the British also left behind a well-developed infrastructure of good roads and a sound communications system.

Has the PSC been effective during the last 58 years? As indicated earlier, its *raison d'être* was twofold: to expedite the localization of the SCS and to insulate the SCS from politics by ensuring that civil servants are recruited and promoted on the basis of merit. In terms of the first objective of localization, the PSC has been effective as the SCS was localized with the attainment of self-government in June 1959.

However, the second objective of maintaining meritocracy in the SCS has increased the PSC's workload during its first 38 years (1951–1989) through its assumption of the additional functions of disciplinary control and the granting of scholarships and training awards. In view of its limited staff and resources, the problem of the PSC's increasing workload was dealt with by the formation of the PSD in 1983, the creation of the ESC and PCDSC in 1990, and the system of personnel boards in 1995. Table 5.6 demonstrates

**Table 5.6.** Workload of the PSC in Singapore (1983–2008).

Year	Candidates Considered for Appointments and Promotion	Disciplinary Cases Completed	Scholarships and Training Awards Granted
1983–1989	50,274 (71.1%)	1,148 (47.4%)	1,543 (31.5%)
1990–1994	18,463 (26.1%)	597 (24.6%)	1,207 (24.6%)
1995–2008	1,945 (2.8%)	679 (28.0%)	2,151 (43.9%)
Total	70,682 (100.0%)	2,424 (100.0%)	4,901 (100%)

Source: Compiled from PSC (1984–2009).

that the PSC's workload has declined considerably during 1990–1994 and 1995–2008.

Table 5.6 shows that 71.1 percent of the 70,682 candidates were considered by the PSC for appointments and promotion during 1983–1989. The number of candidates considered for appointments and promotion by the PSC dropped to 18,463 (26.1 percent) during 1990–1994 with the creation of the ESC and PCDSC. The PSC's workload in recruitment and promotion declined dramatically to 1,945 candidates (2.8 percent) after the establishment of 31 personnel boards in 1995. Similarly, 47.4 percent of the 2,424 disciplinary cases were completed by the PSC during 1983–1989, 24.6 percent during 1990–1994, and 28 percent during 1995–2008. In contrast, the PSC's workload in granting scholarships and training awards declined from 31.5 percent during 1983–1989 to 24.6 percent during 1990–1994, but it increased to nearly 44 percent during 1995–2008. In short, while the formation of the ESC and PCDSC had reduced the PSC's workload marginally, the introduction of the personnel boards in 1995 was much more effective in reducing the PSC's workload in recruitment and promotion.

In November 1979, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew said that Singapore's continued success depended on its ability to convert the natural talent pyramid of its population into the expertise pyramid (Lee, 1979a, p. 40). In August 1982, he contended that the combination of Singapore-born and non-Singapore-born talent was responsible for Singapore's success story. However, the problem was that the proportion of non-Singapore-born in the population had declined in recent years. To resolve this problem and to ensure that "the standards of leadership in the Cabinet and efficiency in the public service" would be maintained in the future, Lee proposed the recruitment of talented persons from other countries to supplement the Singapore-born talent (Lee, 1982, p. 18). Accordingly, the "search for talent" policy actually began in October 1980 when the Professionals Information and Placement Service and the Committee for Attracting Talent to Singapore were formed to help in the recruitment of foreign talent to Singapore (Lee, 1982, p. 22). This policy was only publicly announced by Lee in August 1982 (Quah, 1984b, pp. 178–179).

Lee concluded his National Day Rally speech on 19 August 1984 by emphasizing the importance of the quality of leadership for Singapore's success thus:

In the end, whatever the system, it is the quality of the men who run it, that is decisive. For they will decide what to make of the society, and how to get the people to give of

their best. The Singapore system has worked. It will continue to work if you vote for honest, able and dedicated men, and you give them your best, for the good of all. (Lee, 1984, p. 18)

In his recent memoirs, Lee acknowledged the importance to Singapore's development of attracting the "best and the brightest" citizens to join the government and the civil service:

My experience of developments in Asia has led me to conclude that we need good men to have good government ... The single most decisive factor that made for Singapore's development was the ability of its ministers and the high quality of the civil servants who supported them ... It was Singapore's good fortune that we had, for a small, developing country, a fair share of talent, because our own [talent] had been reinforced by the talented men and women who came here for their education, and stayed on for employment or business opportunities. (Lee, 2000b, pp. 735–736)

The PSC has played an important role in contributing to Singapore's development since 1959 by maintaining the tradition of meritocracy inherited from British colonial rule through its ability to attract "the best and brightest" Singaporeans to join the SCS by awarding scholarships to the best students in each cohort. To compete for the best candidates in the labor market, the PSC offers attractive undergraduate scholarships to students with excellent results in their secondary school examinations to study at the local universities or prestigious universities abroad. After graduation, these "scholars" are required to serve in the SCS for a fixed number of years, depending on the duration of their scholarships (Quah, 1995b, p. 336).

Table 5.6 shows that the bulk of the PSC's workload during 1995–2008 involves the granting of scholarships and training awards. Indeed, of the 4,775 candidates considered for all its functions, 2,151 cases (45 percent) dealt with scholarships and training awards, 1,945 cases (41 percent) concerned appointments and promotions, and 679 cases (14 percent) involved discipline. As the PSC no longer monopolizes the awarding of scholarships and training fellowships in Singapore, it has faced increasing competition from the Singapore Armed Forces, the various statutory boards and government-linked companies, as well as the multinational corporations in recent years as they have also provided many attractive scholarships.

In November 1992, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong concluded that meritocracy was the key to Singapore's success as "it is this practice of meritocracy in the civil service, in politics, in business and in schools, which has allowed Singaporeans to achieve excellence and to compete against others" (Goh, 1992, p. 15). However, the PSC as the guardian of meritocracy in the SCS cannot claim full credit for Singapore's success. It would be

more accurate to say that the PSC's insistence on merit and impartiality in recruiting and promoting qualified candidates in the SCS has been a major factor responsible for Singapore's success.

The PSC has succeeded in attracting the "best and brightest" Singaporeans to join the SCS and retaining them during its first four decades. However, as mentioned by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in April 1994, the PSC could not compete with the private sector in the 1990s in attracting and retaining talented personnel in the SCS because of the centralized nature of public personnel management in Singapore. The PSC's inability to compete effectively with the private sector in terms of offering competitive salaries and faster promotion led the government to devolve the recruitment and promotion functions of the PSC to the ESC and PCDCS in 1990 and the personnel boards in 1995 and to increase the salaries of senior civil servants and accelerate the promotion of "high-flyers" to minimize the brain drain from the SCS to the private sector.

## 5.6. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

In sum, the PSC has undergone many changes during its first 58 years. During its first eight years, it was concerned with maintaining meritocracy and accelerating localization in the SCS. However, after the attainment of self-government and a localized SCS in June 1959, the PSC's *raison d'être* has focused solely on ensuring meritocracy in the SCS. As the PSC has limited staff and resources, it has dealt with its increasing workload in two ways: (1) by sharing its workload with the PSD in 1983 and (2) by delegating most of its recruitment and promotion functions to the ESC and PCDCS in 1990 and the 31 personnel boards in 1995.

The PSC has maintained the tradition of meritocracy in the SCS by attracting the "best and brightest" Singaporeans to apply for civil service positions through the awarding of scholarships to the best students in their cohort. The SCS replaced the traditional performance evaluation method inherited from the British with the Shell Company's Performance Appraisal System in October 1983, following the change in philosophy in public personnel management in Singapore in April 1982. However, the adoption of the Shell system was inadequate in terms of accelerating the promotion of high-flyers in the SCS. With the devolution of its major functions of recruitment and promotion to the personnel boards in 1995, the PSC is now mainly concerned with the granting of scholarships and training awards. Even though it is facing stiff competition in recent years from the provision

of scholarships by other public and private organizations, the PSC is still responsible for providing the most scholarships every year in Singapore.

Singapore's rapid economic growth since the 1970s has increased the wage-gap between the SCS and the private sector and resulted in a brain drain of civil servants. Chapter 6 shows that the PAP government has responded to this problem by revising the salaries of civil servants periodically, beginning from 1972 until 1995, when the benchmarking of their salaries to six professions was introduced. Furthermore, to enable the SCS to compete more effectively with the private sector for talented personnel, the PSC's functions of recruitment and promotion were delegated to the ESC and PCDSC in 1990 and the 31 personnel boards in 1995. To retain talented personnel in the SCS, high-flyers are paid competitive salaries and promoted at a faster pace.

The special treatment given to the high-flyers or the scholar bureaucrats (those recruited into the SCS by the PSC through the award of scholarships) is perhaps justified in the Singapore context to attract the "best and brightest" Singaporeans to join the SCS and to enable the SCS to compete effectively with the private sector for talented personnel. Indeed, these scholar bureaucrats are among the major beneficiaries of PAP rule as they are members of the power elite and are well-paid and rewarded with accelerated promotion (Quah, 2001, p. 312). In 2006, the 184 officers in the Administrative Service constituted only 0.3 percent of the 64,539 employees in the SCS (Neo & Chen, 2007, p. 333; Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 52, Table 4.7).

On the other hand, while the scholar bureaucrats have benefited to a great extent from the PAP government's policy of accelerated promotion and competitive pay for high-flyers, this policy has also resulted in serious morale problems for the majority of civil servants, who have been denied such rewards because they are non-scholars and low-flyers.<sup>8</sup> While it is necessary to attract, motivate, and retain the high-flyers (0.3 percent as most if not all of the scholar bureaucrats are in the Administrative Service) in the SCS, it is equally important to ensure that the rest of the civil servants (99.7 percent) are not alienated by the tremendous disparity in salaries, fringe benefits, and promotion prospects (Quah, 1996b, pp. 81–82). For example, there is "a wide disparity in the treatment of scholars and non-scholars" in the Singapore Police Force as the scholars are promoted more rapidly than the non-scholars (Mohamed Farouk, 2002, p. 39).

Table 6.19 in Chapter 6 shows that the salary increases in 1972, 1973, 1979, and 1982 had failed to reduce the brain drain of senior civil servants to the private sector. Hence, it is difficult to understand why the PAP

government has continued to rely *solely* on salary revision to curb the exodus of talented bureaucrats to the private sector. In view of the limited effectiveness of periodic salary revision in curbing the brain drain of Division I officers to the private sector, the PSD should initiate research to ascertain why senior civil servants are leaving the SCS for private sector positions instead of assuming that salary is the only factor. In 1976, Seah Chee Meow pointed out that the brain drain of civil servants to the private sector indicated that “the bureaucratic ethos (such as pride in serving the bureaucracy) has not been effectively instilled among the bureaucrats who tended to be susceptible to purely monetary considerations” (Seah, 1976, p. 61). While the higher salaries in the private sector constitute an important “pull” factor for the brain drain, the importance of such “push” factors like the preferential treatment and accelerated promotion of high-flyers or scholar bureaucrats at the expense of the non-scholar bureaucrats in the SCS should not be ignored.

In their survey of 108 managers from various industries in India, Lichia Yiu and Raymond Saner found that these managers identified these seven major causes for employee turnover: salary (78 percent); career advancement (65 percent); relationship with supervisor (48 percent); recognition (41 percent); job content (40 percent); economic growth and talent competition (36 percent); and training and development opportunities (21 percent) (Yiu & Saner, 2008, p. 9). Accordingly, they concluded that “monetary enticement” is a necessary but insufficient factor to account for employee turnover in India thus:

High employee turnover is a serious business problem which cannot be simply smothered by salary increases and other costly extrinsic incentives alone. (Yiu & Saner, 2008, p. 17)

The implementation of Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21) in the SCS is discussed in detail in Chapter 8. However, it should be noted here that when PS21 was introduced in May 1995, the aim of the PS21 Staff Well-being Committee was “to promote policies and programs for the well-being of public servants.” However, it is surprising that for the past 14 years, PS21 has ignored the problem of low morale among non-scholar civil servants in spite of its concern with improving the well-being of all civil servants.

Thus, instead of relying only on salary revision, the SCS should also improve the low morale of the non-scholar civil servants by minimizing the preferential treatment of the scholar bureaucrats, and by relying also on non-monetary rewards to promote loyalty among all civil servants, especially those who are non-scholars.

Edgar H. Schein has alluded to another problem arising from the special treatment of the scholar bureaucrats in his study of the culture of the Economic Development Board when he referred to “the danger of elitism” (Schein, 1996, p. 219). He highlighted the “tendency to become arrogant and the danger that one becomes blind to one’s own areas of incompetence.” However, he asserted that “the real danger of elitism” is that “the members of the elite get caught up in their own mental models to such a degree that they cease to observe accurately what is going on around them” (Schein, 1996, pp. 220–221). Since “success corrupts [and] humility is lost” the arrogance of the scholar bureaucrats “creates blind spots” and makes it very difficult for them “to diagnose where they were vulnerable or in need of new learning” (Schein, 1996, p. 229).

In the same vein, Neo and Chen have referred to the public sector elites’ “intellectual arrogance” when they “speak frequently of the need to ‘explain and sell government policies.’” These scholar bureaucrats do not expect “the same quality of thinking and ideas” from the “regular graduate officers in their department” or the businessmen or entrepreneurs they work with (Neo & Chen, 2007, pp. 449–450). Echoing Schein’s criticism, Neo and Chen warn that “intellectual elitism that is closed to alternative views and resistant to expressions of contrary opinion creates systemic blind spots for [the] public sector policy elites” (Neo & Chen, 2007, p. 452).

The PSC Chairman, Eddie Teo, referred recently to the same problem when he advised 350 scholars at the Singapore Seminar on 31 October 2009 in London not “to look down on non-scholars because they know that many non-scholars have deeper knowledge and more wisdom.” They should instead learn the ropes and be humble by starting from the bottom with operational jobs as the outcome of policy-making is not only the result of “their own brilliance” but “the combined effort of their team” (Teo, 2009a, p. 7, 2009b, p. A28). He reminded them that “the system must allow non-scholars to also rise to the top, in case they are late bloomers, or we miss them out in the earlier selection process for another reason” (Teo, 2009a, p. 4). However, he revealed that bond breaking was not a serious problem as only 9 out of 791 scholars (1.13 percent) broke their bonds during 1999–2008 (Teo, 2009a, p. 5). Finally, he reprimanded some young scholars for their “poor attitude” as their reluctance to assume ground postings make them lose touch with ground issues and “lose their empathy for ordinary Singaporeans” (Teo, 2009a, pp. 8–9).

If these two problems of low morale among the non-scholars and the arrogance of the scholars are not resolved, there will be serious repercussions on the performance of the SCS in the long run. Indeed,

a great deal needs to be done by the PSC and the SCS to improve the non-scholars' morale and reduce the scholars' arrogance. Hopefully, the PSC and SCS will rectify these two problems in the near future.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in Fernandez (2001, pp. 136–137).
2. For more details of the PSC's origins, see Quah (1971, pp. 83–94, 1972, pp. 563–570).
3. *Personnel Management in the Civil Service*, 1982, p. 2.
4. *Personnel Management in the Civil Service*, 1982.
5. For the definitions of these qualities, see Lum (1992), Appendix 7, pp. 110–112.
6. Some civil servants have cynically referred to their CEP as their “Career End Point.”
7. As the PSC Chairman is the only full-time member drawing a salary, it is difficult for the PSC to recruit other members who serve part-time and receive allowances for their services as they are usually prominent professionals with their own careers.
8. Many former non-scholar civil servants have informed the author that their major reasons for leaving the SCS were the special treatment of the scholar bureaucrats on the one hand, and the limited career opportunities and promotion prospects for the non-scholar bureaucrats on the other hand.

## CHAPTER 6

# COMPENSATION: PAYING FOR THE “BEST AND BRIGHTEST”

Singapore will remain clean and honest only if honest, able men are willing to fight elections and assume office. They must be paid a wage commensurate with what men of their ability and integrity are earning for managing a big corporation or successful legal or other professional practice. . . . If we underpay men of quality as ministers, we cannot expect them to stay long in office earning a fraction of what they could outside. With high economic growth and higher earnings in the private sector, ministers' salaries have to match their counterparts in the private sector. Underpaid ministers and public officials have ruined many governments in Asia. Adequate remuneration is vital for high standards of probity in political leaders and high officials.

– Lee (2000b, pp. 192–193)

In my comparative analysis of the public personnel systems in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand in 1986, I found that in terms of compensation, civil servants in Singapore were paid the highest salaries among the five countries (Quah, 1986, p. 256). In 1993, the World Bank study on *The East Asian Miracle* noted that “in bureaucracies, as in nearly everything else, you get what you pay for” (World Bank, 1993, p. 175). Accordingly, “Singapore, which is widely perceived to have the region’s most competent and upright bureaucracy, pays its bureaucrats best” (World Bank, 1993, p. 176).

In October 1994, a White Paper on *Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government: Benchmarks for Ministers and Senior Public Officers* was presented to Parliament to justify the pegging of the salaries of public officials to six private sector professions in Singapore (Republic of Singapore, 1994a). On 29 June 2000, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced in Parliament a revision of the salary structure of senior civil servants and ministers to increase the performance-related component. Arising from this salary revision, the Prime Minister’s annual salary was increased from S\$1,699,000 (US\$982,080) to S\$1,940,000 (US\$1,121,387)

(Lee, 2000a).<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister's annual salary was further increased from S\$3,091,200 (US\$2,051,092) in 2007 to S\$3,760,000 (US\$2,657,619) in January 2008 (Lee, 2007).<sup>2</sup>

Why has the People's Action Party (PAP) government decided to pay senior civil servants and ministers such high salaries? What are the consequences of this policy? Is Singapore's policy of paying competitive salaries to ministers and senior bureaucrats applicable to other countries? To answer these questions, this chapter begins by defining compensation and identifying its functions before tracing the evolution of changes in compensation in the Singapore Civil Service (SCS).

## 6.1. MEANING AND FUNCTIONS OF COMPENSATION

Compensation refers to "all forms of financial returns and tangible services and benefits employees receive as part of an employment relationship" (Milkovich & Newman, 1999, p. 6). A more specific definition is provided by Edwin B. Flippo, who has defined compensation as "the adequate and equitable remuneration of personnel for their contribution to organization objectives." He identifies its three components as: basic wage or salary (to attract qualified candidates); variable compensation (to motivate job performance); and supplementary fringe benefits (to retain talented staff) (Flippo, 1984, p. 281). Table 6.1 identifies the functions of these three components of compensation.

Compensation is important for three reasons. First, as salaries and wages on the average constitute 80 percent of an organization's budget, the most effective way to reduce costs is to retrench staff. Second, compensation performs two functions for the individual: it is usually the sole means of economic survival; and also an important factor influencing his or her status

**Table 6.1.** Functions of Compensation.

Type of Compensation	Function
Basic compensation	To attract qualified candidates to the Civil Service
Variable compensation	To motivate civil servants towards superior performance
Supplementary compensation	To retain talented civil servants

Source: Flippo (1984, p. 281).

in society. Third, low salaries also encourage and have contributed to rampant petty corruption in the civil services in many Asian countries.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Dennis L. Dresang’s four important principles of compensation in the public sector should be noted:

1. Compensation must be at a high enough level to *attract* good people. If the compensation is low, it will discourage good candidates from applying for civil service positions.
2. The distribution of salaries and benefits within the agency must be perceived as equitable in order to *retain* good staff.
3. Compensation is also expected to *motivate* employees to apply their full talents and energy to their work. Productive staff should be rewarded in the form of higher pay or more rapid promotion than their less productive colleagues.
4. The managerial functions of compensation must be done within the employer’s *ability to pay* (Dresang, 1984, p. 268).

## 6.2. HISTORY OF SALARY REVISIONS

In Chapter 3, the origins of the SCS were traced to the civil service of the English East India Company in the late 18th century. During the pre-colony phase (1819–1867), the SCS was mixed in composition as it had covenanted, uncovenanted, and extra-covenanted officers. Covenanted civil servants were recruited from England and signed a bond with the East India Company to serve for a stipulated period of years. They were trained at the Company’s administrative school at Haileybury and were given important positions (Seah, 1971, pp. 3–4). The recruits’ next of kin were required to execute penalty bonds of £3,000 each to prevent corruption in obtaining nominations from the Company’s directors (Tan, 1957, p. 27).

Uncovenanted civil servants were recruited locally in the Straits Settlements from among the local people or from those Europeans who had settled in the territories under the Company’s jurisdiction. As they occupied the subordinate and clerical grades in the civil service, the uncovenanted civil servants received lower salaries than their covenanted counterparts. Consequently, “there was a great gap in the salaries and conditions of service of the covenanted and uncovenanted civil servants which gave rise to a certain amount of animosity and jealousy” (Lee, 1976, p. 89). Finally, extra-covenanted civil servants were those individuals who

were granted covenants locally because of their exceptional administrative capabilities (Lee, 1976, pp. 89–90).

During the period of crown colony rule (1867–1942), the SCS was restricted to European (i.e., British) candidates as “local candidates were excluded from entering into the higher echelons of the Civil Service even though they might have possessed the requisite qualifications” (Seah, 1971, p. 12). More importantly, local officers were discriminated against in terms of salary and prospects for promotion. According to Seah Chee Meow, “the decision to pay European officers a higher salary was based on racial criteria” (Seah, 1971, p. 15). The Public Services Salaries Commission of 1919 justified the necessity for remunerating European officers’ higher wages thus:

Malaya is not a suitable country for the “poor white”; unless a European can earn a wage on which he is able to live decently as a European should, he merely brings discredit and contempt upon the European community.<sup>4</sup>

From Table 6.2, it can be seen that the salaries of the European officers in Malaya (including Singapore) were higher than their counterparts in Ceylon (known as Sri Lanka today), Gold Coast, and Nigeria. In short, the salary differentials between the covenanted (senior) and uncovenanted (junior) officers and between the European (or expatriate) and local officers can be traced to the discriminatory practices of the SCS during the colonial period.

The Bucknill Report of 1919 for Senior Officers and the Report of the Subordinate Services Salaries Committee of 1920 for Junior Officers

**Table 6.2.** Comparative Salary Schemes in £ per annum for European Officers in Ceylon, Gold Coast, Malaya, and Nigeria according to the type of services performed (1928).

Service	Ceylon	Gold Coast	Malaya	Nigeria
Agriculture	500–960	480–920	560–1120	480–920
Civil/Political	450–1300	450–960	630–1400	450–960
Education	Local recruits	480–920	560–1120	480–920
Forests	500–900	480–920	560–1120	480–920
Medical	Local recruits	660–960	700–1120	660–960
Police	460–1000	400–920	490–1050	400–840
Public works	480–920	480–920	560–1120	480–920
Veterinary	No scale <sup>a</sup>	600–920	560–1120	600–920

<sup>a</sup>No salary scale was devised as there were only two applicants.

Source: Seah (1971, p. 15, Table 1.1).

recommended a Cost of Living Allowance, which was paid until its removal in 1931 as a measure of economy. The 1937 MacGregor Commission recommended the payment of a Children’s Allowance to the European officers (Republic of Singapore, 1968, p. 7). In 1946, the Wages and Cost of Living Committee recommended a maximum monthly allowance of S\$160 for married officers and S\$110 for single officers (Republic of Singapore, 1968, p. 35).

In April 1947, the Trusted Commission was appointed to recommend the “revision of salaries, emoluments, and other conditions of service of public officers in Singapore and the Malayan Union” (Malayan Union and Singapore, 1947, p. 1). The Trusted Report recommended the division of the SCS into four divisions: Divisions I, II, III, and IV, according to the educational, professional, or technical qualifications required for the various posts (Malayan Union and Singapore, 1947, p. 6). Table 6.3 shows that the Trusted Report had recommended increases in the salary for only four of the top ten superscale posts in the SCS.

In July 1948, J.V. Cowgill was appointed to review the recommendations of the Trusted Report (Cowgill, 1949, p. 1). He submitted his Report in January 1949 but his recommendations were not accepted by both governments in Singapore and Malaya (Republic of Singapore, 1968, p. 8). In July 1949, the Singapore Legislative Council appointed a committee chaired by F.C. Benham to review Cowgill’s recommendations and to make recommendations on salary revision in the SCS (Colony of Singapore,

**Table 6.3.** Monthly Salaries and Proposed Monthly Salaries of the Top Superscale Positions in the SCS (1947) (S\$<sup>a</sup>).

Position	Present Monthly Salary	Proposed Monthly Salary
Colonial Secretary	1,600	No recommendation
Chief Justice	1,500	No recommendation
Attorney General	1,450	1,450
Financial Secretary	1,350	No recommendation
Director of Education	1,050	1,150
Director Medical Services	1,050	1,150
Director of Public Works	1,100	1,150
Solicitor-General	1,050	1,100
Comptroller of Customs	1,050	1,050
Registrar Supreme Court	1,050	1,050

<sup>a</sup>The exchange rate in 1947 was S\$8.57 = £1.

Source: Compiled from Malayan Union and Singapore (1947, pp. 27–28, Appendix II).

**Table 6.4.** Monthly Salaries and Proposed Salaries of Top Superscale Positions in Singapore (1949) (S\$<sup>a</sup>).

Position	Present Monthly Salary	Proposed Monthly Salary
Colonial Secretary	1,700	No recommendation
Chief Justice	1,700	No recommendation
Attorney-General	1,450	No recommendation
Financial Secretary	1,450	No recommendation
Commissioner of Police	1,350	No change
Director of Education	1,150	1,400
Director Medical Services	1,150	1,400
Director of Public Works	1,150	1,350
Solicitor-General	1,100	1,250
Comptroller of Customs	1,050	1,200
Comptroller Income Tax	1,050	1,200
Registrar Supreme Court	1,050	No change

<sup>a</sup>The exchange rate in 1947 was S\$8.57 = £1.

Source: Colony of Singapore (1950, p. 103, Schedule IV).

1950, p. iii). The Bentham Committee supported the practice of providing superscale posts but emphasized that the government should select the best candidates available for such posts (Colony of Singapore, 1950, p. vi). However, like the Trusted Commission, the Bentham Committee did not recommend any major salary increases for the top superscale posts in the SCS, as shown in Table 6.4.

In short, the British colonial government employed the mechanism of a commission or committee to review and recommend salary increases for civil servants. However, except for recommending allowances, such commissions or committees were ineffective as their recommendations for salary revision were usually not accepted by the British colonial government.

According to K.B. Krishna, the delay in implementing the recommendations of commissions set up in the colonies was an important characteristic of British imperialism (Krishna, 1939, p. 306). These commissions were established for three reasons. First, these commissions served to register the “benevolent intentions” of British imperialism. Second the commissions were used to discredit the demands of political parties opposed to British imperialism. The third and most important reason was the reliance by the British colonial government on these commissions as a delaying tactic “to gain and bide time, to carry on the same exploitation with a promise of more thorough investigation” (Krishna, 1939, pp. 307–309).

### 6.3. AUSTERITY PHASE, 1959–1971: NO SALARY INCREASES

The PAP won the May 1959 general election and assumed office the following month. It has remained in power for over 50 years after being re-elected for 11 times.<sup>5</sup> The PAP’s predominance and the weak opposition in Parliament have enabled the ruling party to introduce whenever necessary salary revisions for civil servants, judges, and politicians. As Singapore was a poor country when the PAP government assumed office in June 1959, it could not afford to raise the low salaries of the civil servants.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, the government was forced to reduce expenditure as it inherited “national coffers” which were “seriously depleted” (Bogaars, 1973, p. 80).

Accordingly, the Cabinet Budget Committee on Expenditure recommended serious cuts in public service expenditures “including the removal of the cost of living allowance payable to civil servants in the middle and upper salary brackets” (Bogaars, 1973, p. 80). Goh Keng Swee, the then Finance Minister, attributed the government’s drastic decision to remove the variable allowance to the anticipated budgetary deficit of S\$14 million. If the allowance was not removed, the government would be compelled to increase taxes or face financial bankruptcy (Seah, 1971, p. 90; Tan, 2007, p. 87). The reduction of the variable allowance resulted in a savings of S\$10 million (Bogaars, 1973, p. 80).

Table 6.5 shows that the Division I officers were the hardest hit as they lost all their allowances which constituted 35 percent of their basic salaries. Even though the Division IV civil servants were not affected, the local civil servants reaction was “one of disbelief” as they “were not prepared for this abrupt move” (Seah, 1971, p. 91). The government restored the variable allowances in September 1961 as the budgetary situation had improved (Seah, 1971, p. 94).

**Table 6.5.** Reduction in Variable Allowances in the SCS by Salary and Division, June 1959 (S\$).

Division	Salary Scale (Basic)	Previous Allowances	Amount Cut	Net Allowance
I	\$505 & above	35%	All	None
II	\$251–\$504	30%	20%	10%
III	\$220–\$250	25%	5%	20%
IV	\$219 & below	20%	None	20%

Source: Seah (1971, p. 91, Table 4.2).

**Table 6.6.** Division I Monthly Basic Salaries for Superscale Positions in the SCS and the Harvey Commission's Recommendations (S\$).

Position	Monthly Basic Salary (1967)	Proposed Monthly Basic Salary
Grade A Chief Justice	2,570	No recommendation
Grade B Attorney-General	2,270	No recommendation
Puisne Judge	2,100	No recommendation
Grade C	1,950	2,750
Grade D	1,770	2,500
Grade E	1,670	2,350
Grade F	1,620	2,250
Grade G	1,520	2,150

*Source:* Republic of Singapore (1968, pp. 42–43).

In 1968, the Harvey Report on public sector salaries recommended salary increases for most civil servants (Ong, 1982, pp. 38–43). The Harvey Commission recommended salary increases for five grades in the Division I superscale salaries. Table 6.6 summarizes the proposed salary revisions. However, the government did not implement this recommendation until 1973 for two reasons: the economy could not afford a major salary revision and the private sector was not considered a serious threat in terms of competing for talent as promotion exercises for senior civil servants were conducted frequently to retain talented personnel in the SCS (Lee, 1995, pp. 21–22).

#### 6.4. COMPETING FOR TALENT THROUGH SALARY REVISIONS (1972–1994)

As the Singapore economy improved in the 1970s, the higher salaries in the private sector contributed to a brain drain from the SCS. Accordingly, civil service wages were revised to curb the loss of talent. The National Wages Council (NWC) was established by the PAP government in February 1972 as an advisory body to formulate general guidelines on wage policies, to recommend annual wage adjustments, and to advise on incentive systems for improving efficiency and productivity (Then, 1998, pp. 220–221). The NWC recommended the payment of the Annual Wage Supplement (AWS) and Bonus and Annual Wage Increase (AWI). The AWS was a single annual payment to supplement the employee's annual salary. The amount of the AWS varied from one to three months' wages, depending on the average of the bonuses paid between June 1969 and June 1972. Except for banks and

trading houses, which paid their employees an additional three months salary per year, the other companies and the SCS paid their employees one month’s salary as the AWS, which became known as the “13th month pay” in Singapore (Then, 1998, p. 222). Thus, the purpose of the 13th month salary was to minimize the gap between salaries in the public and private sectors in Singapore. In 1973, the salaries of senior civil servants were increased substantially to reduce the gap with the private sector (Quah, 1984c, p. 296).

Why did the PAP government increase the salaries of civil servants in 1972, 13 years after assuming office? By 1972, the GDP per capita had increased to S\$3,206 (Department of Statistics, 1983, p. 55) and the PAP government was re-elected for the third time after winning all the 65 parliamentary seats and capturing 70.43 percent of the valid votes in the September general election (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1998, p. 338). The September 1972 general election was the second time that the PAP government had “a clean sweep” as it had also won all the 58 parliamentary seats in the April 1968 general election. In short, the PAP government’s parliamentary dominance and the growing brain drain of talented civil servants to the private sector forced it to introduce the 13th month salary.

In May 1979, the then Minister for Trade and Industry, Goh Chok Tong, justified a further salary increase thus:

The terms and conditions of the Administrative Service must match the best in the private sector. The Government has compared the incomes of graduates in the public and private sectors. . . . [It] has concluded that the immediate problem is . . . the . . . gross disparity between what the outstanding graduates are earning in the private sector compared to what the high-flyers are earning in the Administrative Service. This revision of the salary structure of the Administrative Service is to put right this gap in earnings of top graduates. (Republic of Singapore, 1979, cols. 359–360)

He also announced the creation of (a) Staff Grades I, II, and III above Superscale A; (b) two Superscale Grades D1 and C1; and (c) a Senior Administrative Assistant grade between the Administrative Assistant and Assistant Secretary grades (Republic of Singapore, 1979, col. 360). Table 6.7 provides details of the Superscale Grades in the SCS, including the new grades recommended.

In 1981, the Research and Statistics Unit of the Inland Revenue Department conducted a survey on the employment and earnings of 30,197 graduates, or 81.5 percent of the working graduate population enumerated in the 1980 population census. The survey found, among other things, that graduates in the private sector earned, on the average, 42 percent more than those in the public sector.<sup>7</sup> The Public Service

**Table 6.7.** Monthly Basic Salaries of Superscale Grades in the SCS in May 1979 and New Grades.

Position	Monthly Basic Salary (S\$)
<i>Permanent Secretary</i>	
Staff Grade III <sup>a</sup>	15,000
Staff Grade II <sup>a</sup>	13,000
Staff Grade I <sup>a</sup>	11,000
Superscale Grade A	9,370
Superscale Grade B1	8,650
Superscale Grade B	7,930
Superscale Grade C1 <sup>a</sup>	7,210
Superscale Grade C	6,490
<i>Deputy Secretary</i>	
Superscale Grade D1 <sup>a</sup>	5,770
Superscale Grade D	5,050
Superscale Grade E	4,325
Superscale Grade F	3,965
Superscale Grade G	3,605
Superscale Grade H	3,200

<sup>a</sup>New Superscale Grades.

Source: Republic of Singapore (1979, cols. 375–376, Annex A).

Commission (PSC) provided figures to show that eight superscale and 67 timescale administrative officers had resigned from the SCS during 1978–1981 for more lucrative jobs in the private sector.<sup>8</sup> The government revised the salaries of those in the Administrative Service and other Professional Services in April 1982 to tackle the two problems of wide disparity in pay between graduates in the public and private sectors, and the serious brain drain of senior civil servants from the SCS to the private sector (Quah, 1984c, pp. 296–297).

In December 1986, the Minister for Finance, Richard Hu, appointed a Task Force to consider how the NWC Sub-committee on Wage Reform's recommendations could be adopted in the public sector (Ministry of Labor, 1988, p. i). The Task Force recommended that the public sector in Singapore should adopt a flexible wage system with four components: a basic wage; a monthly variable component (MVC); a variable 13th month Non-Pensionable Annual Allowance (NPAA); and a mid-year or year-end variable bonus (VB) (Ministry of Labor, 1988, p. 2; Public Service Division, 1988, p. 1). The PAP government accepted the Task Force's recommendations and implemented the new flexible wage system in the SCS and

**Table 6.8.** Monthly Basic Salaries and Monthly Variable Component for Superscale Grades in the SCS (1988).

Grade	Basic Salary (\$S)	Monthly Variable Component <sup>a</sup>	Gross Salary (\$S)
Staff Grade III	21,700	5,521.44	27,221.44
Staff Grade II	18,800	4,783.56	23,583.56
Staff Grade I	15,900	4,045.67	19,945.67
Grade A	13,600	3,460.45	17,060.45
Grade B1	12,500	3,180.56	15,680.56
Grade B	11,500	2,926.11	14,426.11
Grade C1	10,500	2,671.66	13,171.66
Grade C	9,500	2,417.23	11,917.23
Grade D1	8,500	2,162.78	10,662.78
Grade D	7,500	1,908.33	9,408.33
Grade E1	7,000	1,653.89	8,781.12
Grade E	6,500	1,653.89	8,153.89
Grade F	6,000	1,526.67	7,526.67
Grade G	5,500	1,399.44	6,899.44
Grade H	5,000	1,272.22	6,272.22

<sup>a</sup>The MVC constitutes 25.44 percent of the basic salary.

Source: Public Service Division (1988, p. 23, Annex II).

statutory boards on 1 July 1988. Table 6.8 shows the monthly basic salary and MVC for the Superscale Grades in the SCS in 1988.

On 17 March 1989, the then Minister for Trade and Industry, Lee Hsien Loong, recommended a hefty salary increase for the SCS as the low salaries and slow advancement in the Administrative Service had contributed to its low recruitment and high resignation rates. He justified the need for this salary revision in his Ministerial Statement in Parliament in the following way:

The need to revise salaries is most acute in the Administrative Service. . . . Over the last 20 years, the Government has been able to identify and develop a core of young, able administrators to succeed the older generation of Permanent Secretaries. However, we have not succeeded in maintaining this flow of talent into the Civil Service. . . . Annual recruitment in the Administrative Service has declined steadily from a peak of 37 in 1974 to an average of less than 10 per year in recent years. . . . There is no queue of qualified applicants seeking to join the Administrative Service. Many of those within the Service have left as soon as their bonds have expired, and some even sooner. Every one of those who were recruited in 1975 and 1976 has left. So have three-quarters of the 1977 and 1978 cohorts, and half of the 1983 cohort. As the economy boomed after the 1985 recession, able young officers quit for more attractive jobs elsewhere. . . . From a peak in 1975 of 260 officers, it [the Administrative Service] has declined to 183 this year, down by 30%. . . . The most successful of those who left the Service are earning 40% to 100% more than their contemporaries who stayed. . . . Able civil servants are opting out and

they are not being replaced fast enough. Low salaries and slow advancement are major factors in low recruitment and high resignation rates. A substantial salary rise for the key individuals in the public sector, especially the Administrative Service and related services, is therefore essential. (Republic of Singapore, 1989a, cols. 378–380 and 382)

Lee stressed that as the government's fundamental philosophy was to "pay civil servants market rates for their abilities and responsibilities," it "will offer whatever salaries are necessary to attract and retain the talent that it needs." Furthermore, he pointed out that the salary revision was "designed to catch up with several years of rising private sector incomes, and to make public service careers more competitive with the private sector." He concluded his speech in Parliament by promising that the government "will continue to carry out regular surveys of private sector salaries to stay competitive" as "paying civil servants adequate salaries is *absolutely essential* to maintain the quality of public administration which Singaporeans have come to expect" (Republic of Singapore, 1989a, cols. 382–383, 396, emphasis added). Table 6.9 shows the monthly basic salary of superscale civil servants in 1985 and their new monthly basic salaries from 1 April 1989.

Six days later, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, announced in Parliament that the government would be also revising the salaries of political, judicial, and other statutory appointments in addition

**Table 6.9.** Monthly Basic Salary of Superscale Civil Servants in Singapore (1985 and 1989) (S\$).

Position	Monthly Basic Salary (1985)	Monthly Basic Salary (1989)
P.S. Staff Grade V	NA	32,425
P.S. Staff Grade IV	NA	27,825
P.S. Staff Grade III	21,700	23,225
P.S. Staff Grade II	18,800	20,125
P.S. Staff Grade I	15,900	17,025
P.S. Grade A	13,600	14,550
P.S. Grade B	11,500	12,300
P.S. Grade C	9,500	10,175
D.S. Grade D1	8,500	9,100
D.S. Grade D	7,500	8,100
D.S. Grade E1	7,000	7,550
D.S. Grade E	6,500	7,000
D.S. Grade F	6,000	6,450
D.S. Grade G	5,500	5,900
D.S. Grade H	5,000	5,350

Note: P.S., Permanent Secretary; D.S., Deputy Secretary; NA, not applicable.

Source: Republic of Singapore (1989a, cols. 473–474, Annex D).

to the salary revision for the civil servants. He began by emphasizing the importance of attracting the best Singaporeans to be part of the government:

If we want the right decisions to be taken for Singapore, we must continue to get the right people to do the job. . . . Every one of Singapore’s Ministers must come from the top of their cohorts. . . . I can say that nearly every Minister in the present Cabinet was among the top students of their year. (Republic of Singapore, 1989b, cols. 749–750)

However, Goh added that “such men are increasingly difficult to recruit” because “successful Singaporeans are seldom eager to enter politics” for the following reasons:

Putting aside any loss in salaries, why should they give up the certainty of a good career and a good future in a profession, or a bank, or a big company or the Civil Service, for the uncertainty of ministerial office? Why should they give up their privacy and subject themselves to the glare of publicity? Why should they spend more time with voters when they need the time to spend with their families? Why should they be called upon when others can do it? Why should they do it when others are running the government so well, and they, like everyone else, are enjoying the fruits of economic progress? (Republic of Singapore, 1989b, cols. 750–751)

Accordingly, Goh argued that it was “necessary to minimize the sacrifice that a person is asked to make, and minimizing the financial sacrifice is the least we should do” (Republic of Singapore, 1989b, col. 752). He concluded thus:

If Singapore is to continue to have able men in Government, we must at least ensure that after having sacrificed their privacy, leisure and family time, such people do not also have to make too large a financial sacrifice. (Republic of Singapore, 1989b, col. 753)

Table 6.10 provides the details of the monthly basic salaries of the political and judicial appointments before and after the 1 April 1989 revision.

In December 1993, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced in Parliament that the salaries of ministers and senior civil servants would be increased in January 1994 to keep pace with the private sector and to compensate for the reduction in their medical benefits.<sup>9</sup> While the government could not “match private sector incomes dollar for dollar,” he stressed that it should nevertheless not let the gap between public and private sector salaries to widen. Since private sector incomes have increased much faster than public sector incomes after the 1989 salary revision, the 1994 revision was designed “to enable the Civil Service to catch up with the private sector, and restore the relativity between the two” (Republic of Singapore, 1993, col. 1213). There was an average salary increase of 20 percent for the Administrative Service and superscale officers received between 21 and 34

**Table 6.10.** Monthly Basic Salaries of Political and Judicial Appointments in Singapore (1985 and April 1989) (S\$).

Appointment	Monthly Basic Salary (1985)	Monthly Basic Salary (April 1989)
President	25,000	39,425
Prime Minister	23,900	38,275
1 Deputy Prime Minister	20,600	31,875
2 Deputy Prime Minister	18,800	28,950
Chief Justice	18,800	28,950
Senior Minister	18,400	28,375
Speaker	17,400	28,100
Minister	–	27,825
	16,700	22,100
Attorney-General/Chairman PSC	15,900	21,100
Judges	13,600	19,550
Senior Minister of State	–	17,025
	–	14,550
	11,500	12,300
Minister of State	–	12,300
	9,500	10,175
	–	9,100
Permanent Secretary	9,500	10,175
Senior Parliamentary Secretary	–	8,100
	6,500	7,550
Parliamentary Secretary	6,000	7,000
Political Secretary	5,500	6,450
Member of Parliament <sup>a</sup>	3,000	4,000

<sup>a</sup>Members of Parliament receive a tax-free monthly allowance to enable them to perform their duties.

Source: Republic of Singapore (1989b, col. 833, Annex B).

percent increase in wages, including bonuses. Table 6.11 shows the monthly gross salaries for superscale officers in the Singapore Administrative Service in 1994 and Table 6.12 provides details of the new salary scales for the political and judicial appointments after the January 1994 revision.

## 6.5. INSTITUTIONALIZING SALARY REVISION: BENCHMARKING WITH PRIVATE SECTOR

On 21 October 1994, a White Paper on *Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government* was presented to Parliament to justify the

**Table 6.11.** Monthly Gross Salary for Superscale Officers in the Singapore Administrative Service (January 1994).

Grade	S\$	US\$ <sup>a</sup>
Staff Grade V	38,799	25,866
Staff Grade IV	33,261	22,174
Staff Grade III	27,723	18,482
Staff Grade II	24,041	16,027
Staff Grade I	20,359	13,573
Superscale A	17,392	11,595
Superscale B	14,658	9,772
Superscale C	12,187	8,125
Superscale D1	10,205	6,803
Superscale D	9,302	6,201
Superscale E1	8,614	5,743
Superscale E	7,927	5,285
Superscale F	7,290	4,860
Superscale G	6,653	4,435

<sup>a</sup>The exchange rate in July 1994 was US\$1.00 = S\$1.50.

Source: *Straits Times*, 4 December (1993, p. 28).

benchmarking of the salaries of ministers and senior civil servants to the average salaries of the top four earners in six private sector professions, viz., accounting, banking, engineering, law, local manufacturing companies, and multinational corporations. The White Paper recommended the introduction of formal salary benchmarks for ministers and senior bureaucrats, additional salary grades for political appointments, and annual salary reviews for the SCS.

Annual revisions would be based on a formula linking a Staff Grade I Minister’s salary at “two-thirds the average principal earned income of the top four individuals” from each of the six professions, and a Superscale G Administrative Officer to “the average of the principal earned income of the 15th person aged 32-years old, belonging” to the same professions (Republic of Singapore, 1994a, pp. 12–13). The adoption of the long-term formula suggested in the White Paper removed the need to justify the salaries of ministers and senior civil servants “from scratch with each salary revision,” and also ensured the building of “an efficient public service and a competent and honest political leadership, which have been vital for Singapore’s prosperity and success” (Republic of Singapore, 1994a, p. 18).

In short, the White Paper “institutionalizes the government’s practice of matching public pay to the private sector, dollar for dollar” as it enables the government to revise automatically public sector salaries in response to

**Table 6.12.** Monthly Gross Salary of Political and Judicial Appointments in Singapore (January 1994) (S\$).

Appointment	Monthly Gross Salary
President	47,326
Prime Minister	45,867
Senior Minister	45,415
Deputy Prime Minister	35,265
Chief Justice	34,628
Speaker	33,579
Minister	33,261
	26,938
Attorney-General	26,456
Chairman, PSC	26,456
Judge of Appeal	25,252
Judge	23,411
Senior Minister of State	20,359
	17,392
	14,658
Minister of State	14,658
	12,187
Auditor-General	12,187
Minister of State	10,205
Senior Parliamentary Secretary	9,302
	8,614
Parliamentary Secretary	7,927
Political Secretary	7,290
Member of Parliament	4,516

*Source:* Republic of Singapore (1993, cols. 1277–1282, Annex B).

increases in private sector salaries (Lee, 1995, p. 26). Apart from removing the need to justify future salary revisions, the practice of benchmarking public sector salaries with those in the private sector has led to less transparency, because the salary scales for civil service, political, and judicial appointments are not published in the budget from the 1995 Financial Year onwards.

Arising from the White Paper's recommendation, the salaries of the Singapore Administrative Service were revised accordingly. Table 6.13 provides the details of the monthly gross salaries of the Administrative Officers in 1995.

In 1996, the salaries of ministers and senior civil servants were raised as both benchmarks went up. However, in 1997 the Asian financial crisis and the subsequent slowing down of the Singapore economy led to a 2 percent decrease in Superscale G and a 7 percent decrease in Staff Grade I salaries,

**Table 6.13.** Monthly Gross Salaries of Superscale Officers in the Singapore Administrative Service (1995).

Grade	Monthly Gross Salary (S\$)
Staff Grade V	\$53,780
Staff Grade IV	\$46,115
Staff Grade III	\$38,450
Staff Grade II	\$33,340
Staff Grade I	\$28,230
Superscale A	\$24,120
Superscale B	\$20,340
Superscale C	\$16,900
Superscale D1	\$14,345
Superscale D	\$13,010
Superscale E1	\$12,065
Superscale E	\$11,120
Superscale F	\$10,235
Superscale G	\$9,345

Source: Lee (1995, p. 88, Appendix A).

and the reduction of the employers' contribution to the Central Provident Fund (CPF) from 20 percent to 10 percent for all employees. The purpose of the CPF reduction was to enhance the Singapore economy's competitiveness by lowering the cost of doing business. In other words, the cut in CPF contribution was an additional reduction in the salaries of the ministers and senior civil servants.

When the Singapore economy recovered in 1999 with a growth rate of 5.4 percent, and the reduction of retrenchments from 29,100 in 1998 to 14,600 in 1999, wages in the private sector began to rise again. Unemployment fell from 4.3 percent in December 1999 to 3.4 percent in March 2000. Given the tight labor market in Singapore and the improved conditions in the private sector, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong revealed in Parliament on 29 June 2000 that eight administrative officers had resigned in 2000. Since attracting and retaining talent in the SCS was "quickly becoming a real problem," the government had to respond swiftly by changing both the salaries and terms of service, as well as the incentives and rewards for those occupying public-service leadership (PSL) jobs, viz., the permanent secretaries, deputy secretaries, chief executive officers of major statutory boards, and heads of key departments.

To reinforce the link between pay and individual performance, Lee suggested that a performance-related component be included in the total

**Table 6.14.** Salaries of Selected Ministers and Senior Civil Servants (June 2000) (S\$).

Grade	Current Salaries		Ranking <sup>a</sup>	Revised Salaries		Ranking <sup>a</sup>
	Monthly	Annual		Monthly	Annual	
PM	\$85,000	\$1.69 m	85	\$85,300	\$1.94 m	63
Minister	\$48,900	\$1.13 m	239	\$55,700	\$1.42 m	137
SG II				\$49,900	\$1.27 m	180
				\$44,600	\$1.13 m	239
Minister	\$37,800	\$861,000	491	\$47,400	\$1.21 m	206
SG I				\$37,900	\$968,000	367
Superscale B	\$28,000	\$638,000	929	\$39,800	\$1.01 m	318
				\$28,800	\$736,000	699
Superscale G	\$13,400	\$242,000	> 1000	\$18,800	\$390,000	> 1000
				\$17,500	\$363,000	> 1000

<sup>a</sup>This refers to the ranking among the top earners in Singapore.

Source: *Straits Times*, 30 June (2000, p. 53).

wage package of every civil servant. The benchmark was also broadened from the four top earners in six professions to the top eight earners in six professions. The variable component of annual salaries was increased from 30 percent to 40 percent of the total annual pay of the superscale administrative officers and ministers. Table 6.14 provides details of the new salaries for selected ministers and senior civil servants.

Tables 6.15 and 6.16 identify the major components of the current and proposed salaries and allowances of Superscale G and Staff Grade I officers.

In addition to improving salaries, the 1994 White Paper also recommended faster promotion for promising civil servants by shortening the time interval between promotions. Thus, an officer is expected to become a Deputy Secretary at about 32 years and a Permanent Secretary at about 40 years (Jones, 2002b, pp. 80–81). Consequently, during the last few years the number of promotions in the SCS increased as between 17 percent and 21 percent of senior officers were promoted annually (Jones, 2002b, p. 81). Furthermore, the introduction of fixed term appointments of 10 years for Deputy and Permanent Secretaries in 2000 would lead to upward mobility and enhance the promotion prospects for high-flyers in the SCS (Jones, 2002b, p. 81). Indeed, according to Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the limited tenure of the top positions in the SCS would also help to retain talented personnel by encouraging “young and capable officers to

**Table 6.15.** Current and Proposed Salaries and Allowances of Superscale G Administrative Officer (June 2000) (S\$).

Salary Component	Current	Proposed
Annual	\$242,000	\$363,000
Monthly	\$13,440	\$17,490
Total number of months	18 months	20.75 months
Basic	12 months	12 months
Non-pensionable annual Allowance	1 month	1 month
Annual variable component	2 months	1.75 months
Special allowance	1 month	1 month
Performance bonus	2 months	4 months
GDP-related bonus	–	1 month
PSL allowance	–	0 month

Source: *Straits Times*, 30 June (2000, p. 52).

**Table 6.16.** Current and Proposed Salaries and Allowances of Staff Grade I Administrative Officer (June 2000) (S\$).

Salary Component	Current	Proposed
Annual	\$861,000	\$968,000
Monthly	\$37,800	\$37,900
Total number of months	22.78 months	25.53 months
Basic	12 months	12 months
Non-pensionable annual Allowance	1 month	1 month
Annual variable component	2 months	1.75 months
Special allowance	1 month	1 month
Performance bonus	4 months	5 months
Car allowance	2.78 months	2.78 months
GDP-related bonus	NA	1 month
PSL allowance	NA	1 month

Source: *Straits Times*, 30 June (2000, p. 52).

stay on in the [civil] service, in the realistic hope of reaching a PSL (Public Service Leadership) post.”<sup>10</sup>

Lee concluded his address in Parliament by reiterating that “our policy is to pay people according to their market value and contribution, in the case of political-appointment holders, with a discount. Paying officers properly is essential to recruiting the quality of talent that we need to build a first-class

**Table 6.17.** Salaries of Key Appointments (2007–2008).

Appointment	Grade	2007 Salary		2008 Salary	
		Monthly	Annual	Monthly	Annual
President	–	S\$104,840	S\$3,187,000	US\$119,520	S\$3,870,000
		US\$69,564	US\$2,114,657	US\$84,478	US\$2,735,369
Prime Minister	–	S\$101,680	S\$3,091,200	S\$115,920	S\$3,760,000
		US\$67,467	US\$2,051,092	US\$81,934	US\$2,657,619
Minister/Permanent Secretary	MR4	S\$52,420	S\$1,593,500	S\$59,760	S\$1,940,000
		US\$34,782	US\$1,057,329	US\$42,239	US\$1,371,219
Superscale civil servant (entry)	SR9	S\$17,530	S\$384,000	S\$18,240	S\$398,000
		US\$11,632	US\$254,794	US\$12,892	US\$281,312
Member of Parliament	–	S\$13,200	S\$216,300	S\$13,710	S\$225,000
		US\$8,759	US\$143,521	US\$9,690	US\$159,033

*Note:* The exchange rate in 2007 was US\$1 = S\$1.5071 and in 2008 US\$1 = S\$1.4148.

*Source:* Lee (2007).

civil service.” This policy has been effective as foreign investors and international rating agencies have regularly rated “Singapore’s competitiveness highly” and a key aspect of these ratings is “their high assessments of the quality of the government and political leadership” (Lee, 2000a, p. 53).

In December 2007, the Public Service Division (PSD) announced that the salaries of ministers and senior civil servants would be increased from 4 percent to 21 percent from January 2008. Table 6.17 shows the salaries of the President, Prime Minister, Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, superscale civil servants at the entry grade, and Members of Parliament in 2007 and 2008.

However, on 24 November 2008, the PSD announced that the salaries of administrative officers, political, judicial, and statutory appointment holders would be decreased by 19 percent in 2009 because of the economic recession. This meant that the President’s annual salary was reduced to from S\$3.87 million to S\$3.14 million. Similarly, the Prime Minister’s annual salary has been decreased from S\$3.76 million to S\$3.04 million (Public Service Division, 2008, pp. 1–2; see also Li, 2008).

## 6.6. RATIONALE FOR COMPETITIVE PUBLIC SECTOR SALARIES

During the British colonial period, the covenanted and expatriate officers were paid more than the uncovenanted and local officers. When the PAP

government assumed office in June 1959 it removed the variable allowance for senior civil servants to reduce civil service expenditure and to demonstrate that they were in control. The move toward improving salaries in the SCS began in March 1972 with the introduction of the 13th month payment for all civil servants. Salaries in the public sector were revised in 1973, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1989, and 1993. From October 1994, the salaries of senior civil servants and ministers were benchmarked to six professions in the private sector.

What is the rationale for the policy of competitive public sector salaries in Singapore? There are three reasons for the PAP government's decision to improve public sector salaries and to reduce the wage gap between the public and private sectors. As Singapore has a small population, the government has to compete with the private sector and multinational corporations for talented personnel. The economic growth in Singapore during the 1970s forced the PAP government to raise the salaries of civil servants as many of them had left for more lucrative private sector jobs. Thus, the most important reason for the competitive public sector salaries in Singapore is to minimize the brain drain of talented senior civil servants to the private sector. This was the rationale for the various salary revisions since 1972.

The second reason for paying senior civil servants and ministers high salaries in Singapore is to minimize corruption in the public sector. In March 1985, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew contended that political leaders should be paid the top salaries that they deserved in order to ensure a clean and honest government. If ministers and senior civil servants were underpaid, they would succumb to temptation and indulge in corrupt behavior (Quah, 1989c, p. 848). He began the debate in Parliament on ministers' salaries by asking these questions:

How is Singapore to preserve its most precious asset, an administration that is absolutely corruption free, a political leadership that can be subject to the closest scrutiny because it sets the highest standards? Why does this island survive? Why does it attract banks, computer software, financial services, information services, manufacturing, in preference to so many countries better endowed with natural resources, manpower, markets? (Republic of Singapore, 1985a, col. 1204)

Lee's answer to these questions was unequivocal:

Every Member knows that there is no easy money on the take. That is the way we are. Nobody believes we spent money to get into this House. . . . There is no pay-off here. . . . Do we want to maintain our unique system? . . . I am probably the highest paid [Prime Minister] in the Commonwealth if you go by official salary. But I am probably one of the poorest in the Commonwealth. . . . I am one of the best paid and probably one of the poorest of the Third World Prime Ministers. . . . There are ways and ways of doing things

and I am suggesting our way – moving with the market is an honest, open, defensible and workable system. You abandon this for hypocrisy, you will end up with duplicity and corruption. Take your choice. (Republic of Singapore, 1985a, cols. 1211–1213, 1218)

However, as discussed in Chapter 9, Singapore initiated its anti-corruption strategy in 1960 with the reduction of opportunities for corruption by strengthening the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) and the impartial enforcement of the POCA by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) as the government could not afford to reduce the incentive for corruption through raising salaries until 1972 onwards.

Finally, to reinforce the PAP government's emphasis on meritocracy, senior civil servants, and ministers are paid handsome salaries to attract the "best and brightest" citizens to join the government (Quah, 1998, p. 111). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Ezra Vogel has described Singapore as "a macho-meritocracy" because "what is unusual in Singapore is not the prominence of meritocratic administrators, but the fact that the meritocracy extends upwards to include virtually all political leaders" (Vogel, 1989, pp. 1052–1053). The 1994 White Paper had stressed the importance of attracting Singapore's "most outstanding and committed citizens" to become ministers since "competent political leadership is crucial to good government." As Singaporeans "have little incentive to take on the risks and public responsibilities of a political career," the government can remove an obstacle to able Singaporeans entering politics by minimizing the financial sacrifice by paying ministers realistic salaries comparable to those in the private sector (Republic of Singapore, 1994a, pp. 1–2).

In March 1985, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew informed Parliament of the financial sacrifice made by his colleague, E.W. Barker, for embarking on a political career. He said:

I pulled the Member for Tanglin [Barker] into this House in 1963 because I told him that, if I did not get good men, everything would be lost. He came in. He lost money by coming in. By 1970 he said, "That's enough. Things look all right. I have to leave." If Members want to know it [minister's salary] was altered in 1970 ... it was because he could not pay his mortgage. ... I had to up his salary from \$2,500 to \$4,500. (Republic of Singapore, 1985a, col. 1221)

## 6.7. CONSEQUENCES OF PAYING COMPETITIVE PUBLIC SECTOR SALARIES

Table 6.18 shows the increase in the Prime Minister's monthly basic salary from the advent of self-government in May 1959 until the latest salary

**Table 6.18.** Increase in the Singapore’s Prime Minister’s Monthly Basic Salary (1959–2008).

Year	Monthly Basic Salary	Percentage increase
1959	S\$3,050	0
1961	S\$3,500	15
1973	S\$9,500	211
1978	S\$13,695	349
1982	S\$16,500	441
1985	S\$23,900	684
1990	S\$38,275	1,155
1999	S\$85,000	2,687
2000	S\$85,300	2,697
2007	S\$101,680	3,238
2008	S\$115,920	3,701

Sources: Republic of Singapore (1983–2000) and Lee (2007).

revision in January 2008. The salary increase was gradual during the austerity phase (1959–1971) as the Prime Minister’s monthly basic salary increased by 15 percent from S\$3,050 in 1959 to S\$3,500 in 1961. From 1972 to 1994, the Prime Minister’s salary was further increased from S\$3,500 to S\$38,275. After the benchmarking with the private sector in 1995, the monthly basic salary of the Prime Minister has risen by 3,701 percent to S\$115,920 in January 2008.

### 6.7.1. Was the Brain Drain to the Private Sector Curbed?

The policy of paying competitive public sector salaries has been effective in curbing the brain drain of political leaders to the private sector as none of them have resigned from political office to work in the private sector before their retirement. However, some of the old guard leaders were appointed as chairmen of government-linked companies or statutory boards after their retirement from politics. For example, the late Lim Kim San, a former cabinet minister, was Executive Chairman of Singapore Press Holdings, and Dr Yeo Ning Hong, another former cabinet minister, was Chairman of the Singapore Totalisator Board. In a sense, this is the Singapore version of the Japanese *amakudari* or “descent from heaven” or the Korean *nakhasan-insa* or “descent by parachute” (Nakamura & Dairokuno, 2003, p. 114; Kim, 2003 p. 126).

The attractive remuneration for the permanent secretaries has also been effective in retaining them in the SCS as none of them have left for private

**Table 6.19.** Resignation Rate of Division I Officers in the SCS (1971–1984).

Year	Number of Division I Officers Resigned	Number of Division I Officers in SCS	Resignation Rate (%)
1971	142	2826	5.0
1972	163	3621	4.5
1973	205	3874	5.3
1974	256	4136	6.2
1975	259	4633	5.6
1976	326	5249	6.2
1977	293	5479	5.4
1978	269	6002	4.5
1979	307	6430	4.8
1980	322	6634	4.9
1981	474	6912	6.9
1982	351	7298	4.8
1983	309	7754	4.0
1984	272	8396	3.2

*Source:* Republic of Singapore (1985b, Appendix III, Table 2).

sector jobs before their retirement. However, paying competitive public sector salaries has been ineffective in preventing Division I officers from leaving the SCS. Table 6.19 provides the details of the resignation rate of Division I officers in the SCS from 1971 to 1984. As indicated earlier, Lee Hsien Loong had justified the need for the 1989 salary revision because of the Administrative Service's low recruitment and high resignation rates. He revealed that all those administrative officers recruited in 1975 and 1976 had resigned, followed by 75 percent of the 1977 and 1978 cohorts, and 50 percent of the 1983 cohort. In short, the various salary revisions in the 1970s and 1980s did not succeed in curbing the brain drain of administrative officers to the private sector.

#### 6.7.2. Was Corruption Curbed?

No, because corruption had already been minimized in Singapore before 1972, when the PAP government first introduced the 13th month pay. The PAP government assumed office in June 1959 and one year later, the POCA was enacted and it empowered the CPIB to enforce the law impartially. Indeed, "the comprehensive nature of the POCA and the wide powers given to the CPIB constitute an effective combination for the eradication of corruption in Singapore" (Quah, 1978b, p. 19).

As discussed earlier, the PAP government could not afford to raise salaries during the austerity phase (1959–1971). Accordingly, it focused instead on strengthening the POCA to reduce the opportunities for corruption and to increase the penalty for corrupt behavior. As shown in Chapter 9, the effectiveness of this comprehensive anti-corruption strategy is best reflected in Singapore’s status as the least corrupt Asian country from 1995 to 2009, according to the annual surveys conducted by the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) and Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) during this period.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the PAP government’s reliance on the policy of paying competitive public sector salaries reinforces its commitment against corruption as those political leaders and senior civil servants found guilty of corruption are severely punished with S\$100,000 fine and up to five years of imprisonment.

### *6.7.3. Have the “Best and Brightest” Citizens Joined the Government?*

For many years, the Administrative Service has succeeded in attracting the “best and brightest” Singaporeans as the top students of each cohort compete for the President’s Scholarships and the Overseas Merit Scholarships. However, in recent years, the PSC no longer monopolizes the award of scholarships as the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), statutory boards, government-linked companies, and multinational corporations have also offered attractive scholarships.

An analysis of the background of the 1997 Cabinet shows that seven (or 44 percent) of its 16 members were recruited from the SCS and the SAF. Of the seven “bureaucrat politicians” in the 1997 cabinet, two came from the army, one from the navy, and four were recruited from the Administrative Service (Chandran, 1999, p. 72). Table 6.20 shows that the proportion of “bureaucrat politicians” in the Cabinet from 1959 to 2006 has increased from 20 percent in 1968 to 53 percent in the 2001 Cabinet.

Although most of the Cabinet members were drawn from the private sector for most of the 12 Cabinets, the most prominent member to join the 1985 Cabinet was Dr Richard Hu, who was Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Shell Company in Singapore, before entering politics. Dr Hu was appointed as the Minister of Finance and he retained the same portfolio until his retirement in 2001. Lee Kuan Yew, who was then prime minister, praised Richard Hu for his tremendous financial sacrifice in entering politics as he was earning S\$500,000 annually as Shell’s CEO. Lee also referred to

**Table 6.20.** Proportion of “Bureaucrat Politicians” in the Singapore Cabinet (1959–2006).

Cabinet	Proportion of “Bureaucrat Politicians” (%)
1959	22
1963	22
1968	20
1973	23
1977	43
1981	47
1985	31
1989	31
1992	40
1997	44
2001	53
2006	50

*Sources:* Chandran (1999, p. 43, Table 3.3), Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (2003, p. 65), and Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (2007, p. 37).

the example of Dr Tony Tan, who resigned from his position as General Manager of the Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation, and became a minister of state, “for which he was paid less than a third of his former salary, apart from losing his perks, the most valuable of which was a car with a driver” (Lee, 2000b, p. 195).

To persuade successful Singaporeans in the private sector to enter politics, the 1994 White Paper recommended the minimizing of the financial sacrifice “by paying realistic salaries comparable to what potential Ministers can earn in the private sector” because “if the financial sacrifice of becoming a Minister is too large, it will be another obstacle to able Singaporeans entering politics” (Republic of Singapore, 1994a, p. 2). The benchmarking of ministerial salaries to top earners in six professions in the private sector has attracted some successful Singaporeans from the private sector to join politics. An analysis of the current Cabinet shows that five of the new ministers are drawn from the private sector.<sup>12</sup>

## 6.8. LIMITED APPLICABILITY OF SINGAPORE’S APPROACH

In its report, *Leadership for America: Rebuilding the Public Service*, the Volcker Commission contended that “the commitment to performance

cannot long survive, however, unless the government provides adequate pay, recognition for jobs done, accessible training, and decent working conditions" (Volcker, 1990, p. 33). The PAP government agrees with this view and since 1972 it has provided competitive salaries and favorable working conditions for civil servants in Singapore.

On 30 June 2000, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong asked Singaporeans to judge his government on the basis of the results it had delivered. According to his calculations, the price of good government was S\$34 million a year or S\$11 per Singaporean a year. Conversely, the price of bad government could have been a loss of S\$9.5 billion or S\$3,166 per Singaporean if the economy had shrunk by 5 percent during the Asian financial crisis. He said: "The \$6 million increase in the wage bill for the Cabinet – from \$28 million – was small compared to the benefit good government could produce. If it improved GDP by just 1 percent, it was worth \$1.4 billion to Singapore" (Chua, 2000, p. 1).

When the idea of benchmarking public sector salaries to private sector salaries was proposed in 1994, there was a great deal of criticism from the public as the emphasis on compensation detracted from the sense of duty and service to the nation. In his speech at the opening of the induction course for government public relations officers at the Civil Service Institute on 17 May 1982, S. Rajaratnam, Second Deputy Prime Minister (Foreign Affairs) agreed that "a civil servant must be reasonably well paid," but he also stressed that:

what should motivate him is a conviction that his role in society is more crucial to the future of a nation than that of the men in the market place. Without a dedicated bureaucracy even the market place will be no more than the haunt of greedy irresponsible and lawless entrepreneurs. This means that some of the brightest and the best of our citizens must enter the bureaucracy. (Rajaratnam, 1982, p. 32)

As the June 2000 salary increases were even more substantial than the 1994 revision, some critics contended that high salaries had cheapened moral leadership as the leaders were motivated by money (Leong, 2000, pp. 70–71). While paying competitive public sector salaries is important to ensure good government in Singapore, the lack of a fixed ceiling for these salaries can also indirectly affect the country's competitiveness if private sector salaries rise as a result and increase the cost of doing business in Singapore.

The negative public reaction to the high level of public sector salaries in Singapore was best captured in a speech by a PAP MP, Dr Michael Lim, in Parliament on the proposed salary revision on 29 June 2000:

There is still a significant minority of households in Singapore who are low income families. Many of these will find these million dollar salaries, especially for the high office

holders, very mind-boggling numbers which they cannot quite fathom and understand. ... the absolute amounts that the Ministers and top civil servants will get in their remuneration package are so large compared to the average household that it will be very difficult for them to accept these numbers. These are million dollar numbers and some of them in their whole lifetime will never see these numbers. (Republic of Singapore, 2000, col. 423)

The holding of a general election in March 2001 explains why the PAP government decided to raise public sector salaries in June 2000 even though Singapore had not fully recovered from the regional financial crisis yet. To deal with the adverse public reaction to the June 2000 salary revision, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong announced in his National Day Rally speech on 20 August 2000, the introduction of the Children Development Co-Savings Scheme (or Baby Bonus), the extension of the Eldercare Fund “to provide for the entire range of elderly and continuing care,” ex-gratia payment for former MPs and pensioners, a Special Housing Assistance Program to help two-room apartment owners to upgrade to larger apartments, and a Special CPF Top-up of S\$250 for all citizens.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, it is not surprising that the 2001 election year’s budget was also the “most generous” as the individual tax rates were reduced and rebates on service and conservancy charges were given to HDB residents (Divyanathan, 2001, p. 1). Conversely, even though the PAP government had been in power for almost 42 years then, it did not risk losing votes in the March 2001 general election by recommending salary revisions for senior civil servants, judges, and politicians. On the contrary, public sector salaries were later reduced by a combined total of 30 percent in November 2001 and July 2003 because of the recession (Prime Minister’s Office, 2003d).

In the final analysis, the PAP government can reward ministers and senior civil servants in Singapore with increasingly high salaries since 1972 because of the city-state’s affluence and the PAP’s predominance on the Singapore political scene. In stressing the need to ensure good government in Singapore by “recruiting good people for government and paying them properly” in his 2000 National Day Rally speech, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong acknowledged that:

Many Western leaders have told me in private that they envied our system of Ministers’ pay. But they also said that if they tried to implement it in their own countries, they would be booted out. (Goh, 2000, p. 44)

Thus, the PAP government will continue to reward ministers and senior civil servants in Singapore handsomely as long as the country can afford to do so and if its predominance in Singapore politics is not eroded. As these

two prerequisites of political predominance of the incumbent government and economic affluence are difficult to satisfy in other countries, the applicability of Singapore’s experience of making ministerial and civil service salaries competitive with those in the private sector appears to be limited. In short, Singapore’s strategy of matching the salaries of ministers and senior civil servants with those in the private sector has limited applicability in view of its high political and economic costs.

## NOTES

1. The exchange rate in June 2000 was US\$1.00 = S\$1.73.
2. The exchange rate was US\$1.00 = S\$1.5071 in 2007, and US\$1.00 = S\$1.4148 in 2008.
3. For example, Leslie Palmier has identified low salaries as one of the three causes of bureaucratic corruption in his comparative study of bureaucratic corruption in Hong Kong, India, and Indonesia. See Palmier (1985, pp. 271–274).
4. Quoted in Seah (1971, p. 15).
5. See Table 2.2 in Chapter 2.
6. Singapore’s per capita GDP in 1960 was S\$1,330 or US\$443. See Ministry of Trade and Industry (1986).
7. *Sunday Times*, 21 February 1982, p. 1.
8. *Sunday Times*, 28 February 1982, p. 1.
9. *Straits Times*, 4 December 1993, p. 1.
10. Quoted in Jones (2002b, p. 81).
11. Details of Singapore’s ranking and scores on the PERC survey and Transparency International’s CPI are provided in Chapter 9.
12. Dr Ng Eng Hen, the Minister for Education, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Raymond Lim, the Minister for Transport, K. Shanmugam, the Minister for Law, and Gan Kim Yong, the Minister for Manpower, were recruited into politics from the private sector. See <http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/CabinetAppointments/Index.htm> accessed on 9 November 2009.
13. For more details of these schemes, see Goh (2000, pp. 35–37, 46–51).



# CHAPTER 7

## ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

Reforms in the machinery of government are needed to adapt government to the constantly changing needs of society and to enable public administration to reshape society.

– Siedentopf (1982, p. ix)

Unlike the British colonial government, which had neglected administrative reform, the PAP leaders introduced comprehensive reform of the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) after assuming office in June 1959. However, as Singapore was a British colony for nearly 140 years, it is not surprising that the legacy of British colonial rule has influenced to a certain extent subsequent administrative reforms in Singapore. This chapter analyzes the comprehensive reforms initiated by the PAP government during 1959–1960 with special emphasis on the institutional and attitudinal reforms. Three other major reforms are also discussed in this chapter: the redistribution of government functions (1981–1985); reforms in personnel management (1982–1988); and budgetary reforms (1978–1997).

However, three important reforms are not discussed in this chapter as they are dealt with in the other chapters. The anti-corruption reforms introduced in 1960 are analyzed in Chapter 9, which provides a description and evaluation of Singapore’s anti-corruption strategy. The policy of relying on competitive salaries in the SCS to minimize the brain drain of talented civil servants to the private sector was discussed earlier in the previous chapter. Finally, the implementation of Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21), which was introduced in May 1995, is analyzed separately in the next chapter.

### **7.1. WHAT IS ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM?**

In his pioneering book, Gerald E. Caiden defined administrative reform as “the artificial inducement of administrative transformation against

resistance” (Caiden, 1969, p. 1). Caiden’s definition has three implications: (1) administrative reform is artificially stimulated by man and is not accidental, automatic, or natural; (2) administrative reform is a transformative process; and (3) resistance is a concomitant of the process of administrative reform (Dey, 1971, p. 560).

However, Caiden’s definition is not useful for the analysis in this chapter for three reasons. First, his definition does not identify the goals of administrative reform. This silence on the objectives of administrative reform has led one scholar to describe Caiden’s definition as one-sided and incomplete (Parroco, 1970, p. 327). In other words, Caiden’s definition does not answer the question: administrative reform for what?

Second, the phrase “administrative transformation” in Caiden’s definition is vague and does not specify the content of administrative reform. Other scholars like Frederick C. Mosher have equated reform with reorganization (Mosher, 1965, p. 129). Even though most administrative reforms take the form of reorganization, it is incorrect to describe all reform efforts as reorganization because reorganization refers only to the institutional aspect of administrative reform. Reorganization excludes the attitudinal aspect of administrative reform, i.e., “attempts to change the attitudes, behavior, or values of administrators or other individuals involved in the reform process” (Quah, 1976, p. 53).

Third, Caiden’s definition assumes that resistance accompanies the process of administrative reform without providing any empirical evidence to substantiate this assumption. He has simply assumed that resistance exists because change generates uncertainty and insecurity among those who prefer the status quo and they resist the reform to avoid the uncertainty and insecurity resulting from the implementation of the reform. Furthermore, it is simplistic to “assume that a change will be resisted or accepted by the entire organization” (Wyner, 1970, pp. 247–248). The requirement that resistance must be present is too strict a criterion for defining administrative reform and excludes those attempts to change the administration that do not meet with any resistance.

In short, Caiden’s definition is not useful for this chapter because it does not identify the goals of administrative reform or specify the content of administrative reform; and resistance is not a distinguishing feature of administrative reform. The definition of administrative reform to be adopted in this chapter must identify the goals and focus on both the institutional and attitudinal aspects of reform.

Accordingly, for this chapter, administrative reform is defined as “a deliberate attempt to change both (a) the structure and procedures of

the public bureaucracy (i.e., reorganization or the institutional aspect) and (b) the attitudes and behavior of the public bureaucrats involved (i.e., the attitudinal aspect), in order to promote organizational effectiveness and attain national development goals” (Quah, 1976, p. 58).

## **7.2. LIMITED ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM DURING BRITISH COLONIAL PERIOD**

Administrative reform was neglected during the first 125 years of British colonial rule as the public bureaucracy was preoccupied with enforcing colonial rule in Singapore and the economic exploitation of the region for the benefit of the home government in Britain. Thus, the SCS did not play an important role in Singapore’s development during the colonial period and did not introduce administrative reforms until after World War II.

The first administrative reform was introduced in 1947 when the SCS was reorganized and divided into four divisions according to the duties, educational qualifications, and salaries of its members on the recommendation of the Trusted Commission, which was appointed to examine the salaries and conditions of service of the public services in the then Malayan Union and Singapore. Division I consisted of those in the administrative and professional grades, Division II was made up of those in the executive grades, Division III comprised of those in the clerical and technical grades, and Division IV included those performing manual tasks (Malayan Union and Singapore, 1947, p. 6). This fourfold division of the SCS has remained unchanged and provides the basis for determining the points of entry in the SCS today, its salary scales and fringe benefits.

The second administrative reform was the establishment of the Public Service Commission (PSC) on 1 January 1951. In 1946, the British government issued a White Paper on *The Organization of the Colonial Service* (Command Paper No. 197) in the colonies to emphasize the need for localizing and adapting their public services to the local conditions as a prerequisite for attaining self-government. Command Paper No. 197 recommended that PSCs should be established in the colonies to ensure that qualified local candidates would be recruited into the public services. In accordance with the policy set out in the White Paper, the Trusted Commission also recommended in 1947 the creation of a PSC to provide the local candidates with an opportunity of obtaining appointments in the public services (Malayan Union and Singapore, 1947, p. 12). As discussed in

Chapter 5, the PSC continues to be one of the most important central personnel agencies in Singapore today.

The third administrative reform was the replacement of the ineffective Anti-Corruption Branch of the Singapore Police Force (SPF) by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) in October 1952 after three police detectives were implicated in the October 1951 robbery of 1,800 pounds of opium. As discussed in Chapter 9, the formation of the CPIB as an agency independent of the SPF was the breakthrough needed to curb corruption effectively in Singapore.

The fourth administrative reform was introduced in 1955 as a consequence of the change in Singapore's constitutional status from a crown colony to a ministerial form of government under the Rendel Constitution. The colonial secretariat was abolished and the SCS was reorganized into eight ministries such as the Attorney-General's Chambers, Chief Secretary's Office, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Communications and Works, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Housing, Lands and Local Government, and Ministry of Labor and Welfare (Lee, 1976, pp. 360–361). This reorganization is important as it has provided the basic framework for the SCS in the later stages of its development.

### **7.3. RATIONALE FOR THE PAP GOVERNMENT'S COMPREHENSIVE REFORMS**

When it assumed power in June 1959, the PAP government realized that it had to transform the colonial bureaucracy it inherited in order to ensure that its socio-economic development programs were efficiently implemented. Accordingly, it initiated the comprehensive reform of the SCS and created statutory boards for three reasons.

First, the timing was right for the PAP government to introduce comprehensive reforms because its assumption of power marked the end of nearly 140 years of British colonial rule and the beginning of internal self-government in Singapore. Its victory in the May 1959 general election gave the PAP government the mandate to introduce comprehensive reforms to the SCS and to change the civil servants' "colonial mentality" and to make them more sensitive to the population's needs.

In addition to the favorable timing, the PAP leaders also had a positive attitude toward administrative reform and this was manifested in their critical speeches in the Legislative Assembly on various aspects of the

colonial administration. Their decision to rely on statutory boards for the implementation of the public housing and economic development programs to solve the twin problems of housing shortage and unemployment was a wise one and reaped dividends. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 4, the Housing and Development Board's success in public housing and the Economic Development Board's ability to attract foreign investment to reduce unemployment have resulted in the proliferation of many statutory boards by the PAP government during the past 50 years.

The final and most important reason for the PAP government's introduction of comprehensive reforms of the SCS was to ensure its political survival. The PAP government needed a supportive SCS and new statutory boards to ensure its re-election to political office by helping it to fulfill its electoral promises of solving the housing shortage and the unemployment problem.

Following his matrix of optimum reform strategy, Hahn-Been Lee has contended that the comprehensive approach to reform should be employed when both the timing and the leadership are favorable (Lee, 1970, p. 18). While these two factors are important, the third variable of "risk acceptability" or "the degree of risk involved in initiating and implementing the reform" must also be considered (Dror, 1970–1971, pp. 27–28). Since administrative reform involves both institutional and attitudinal changes which might not be accepted by those adversely affected by the reform, the political leaders must assess very carefully the risks involved in undertaking the reform on the one hand, and weigh these risks against the risks in maintaining the status quo on the other hand.

The degree of risk in implementing the administrative reform will be high if the public bureaucracy is opposed to the reform because of its own vested interests. The political leaders, on the other hand, will be anxious to push through the reform to curb the power of the bureaucrats. Accordingly, they must assess carefully whether they are strong enough to meet the opposition from the civil servants if the reform is imposed; and, whether, in the absence of the reform, they will be replaced by the bureaucrats. Reform will only be undertaken by the political leaders "if the risk involved in continuing the existing situation is large, or if considerable gains may be expected" (Leemans, 1970–1971, p. 8). Moreover, the degree of risk involved in undertaking reform is directly related to the scope of the reform. As the risk increases with the scope of the reform effort, a comprehensive reform strategy will incur a higher degree of risk than an incremental reform strategy.

As the degree of risk involved in not reforming the SCS was greater than the risk accompanying the implementation of the reform, the PAP leaders

introduced the reform. They felt that they had nothing to lose if the hostile and alienated civil servants were re-orientated and persuaded to contribute to the attainment of national development goals. On the other hand, the PAP leaders were also uncertain of their long-term survival and their ability to deliver the goods if the status quo was maintained and if the civil servants were permitted to behave as they did during the colonial period (Quah, 1975a, p. 345).

In sum, the PAP leaders initiated the comprehensive reform of the SCS because they realized that the colonial bureaucracy they inherited had serious weaknesses and could not be employed for the attainment of national development goals. Accordingly, they reduced the civil service's workload to increase its efficiency, and created statutory boards to absorb part of the civil service's workload by implementing the socio-economic development programs. Apart from reorganizing the SCS, the PAP leaders knew that they had to change the civil servants' attitudes and to convince them to participate in the process of attaining national development goals. Thus, the source of the internally generated reform was the political leadership, who had viewed the SCS it inherited as defective, and its civil servants as potential opponents to the implementation of its socio-economic development programs. Comprehensive reform of the SCS's structure and attitudinal reform of the civil servants had to be introduced by the PAP government to safe-guard its long-term political survival.

#### **7.4. COMPREHENSIVE REFORM OF THE SCS, 1959–1960**

The reform of the SCS initiated by the PAP government was comprehensive because it emphasized both institutional and attitudinal aspects. For institutional reform, the SCS was reorganized and statutory boards were created.<sup>1</sup> The SCS was reorganized into nine ministries in June 1959 as shown in Table 7.1. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of National Development were the two new ministries formed by the PAP government to deal with nation-building and economic development, respectively (Seah, 1971, pp. 82–84).

In addition to institutional reform, the PAP government subjected the SCS to “intense psychological pressure” because it believed that “the values of the civil servants were irrelevant, if not dysfunctional, in the context of mass politics” (Seah, 1971, p. 86). Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew believed

**Table 7.1.** Reorganization of the Singapore Civil Service in 1959.

Ministry	Subjects	Departments
Prime Minister	–	–
Deputy Prime Minister	Communications	Civil Aviation, Marine, Marine Survey, Meteorological, Telecommunications, Postal Broadcasting, Information Services, Museum and Library, Printing Division, Publicity Division
Culture	Information Cultural Activities	Education and related matters
Education	Education	Income Tax, Customs, Treasury, Statistics, Accountant-General's Office, Establishment Division, Commerce and Industry Division, Supplies Department, Industrial Promotion Board, Currency Office, Exchange Control
Finance	Commerce Establishment Finance	Health Departments
Health	Health	Citizenship Registry, Corrupt Practices, Investigation Bureau, Defense Services, Film Censorship, Immigration, Police, Prisons, Registry of Births and Deaths, Registry of Persons
Home Affairs	Immigration Police Prisons Elections	Labor Department, Official Assignee and Public Trustees, State Advocate-General's Office, Social Welfare Department
Labor and Law	Labor Legal Welfare	Land Office, Public Works, Registry of Titles and Deeds, Singapore Improvement, Trust, Survey, Fisheries, Primary Production Department
National Development	Rural Development Veterinary Fisheries Agriculture	

Source: Seah (1971, p. 83, Table 4.1).

that the SCS “had to understand the political changes that had taken place” so that it could “shoulder its responsibilities and duties accordingly” (Bogaars, 1973, p. 79).

Hence, it was not surprising that one of Lee's first acts on assuming office was to visit all government departments to examine their functions and staff in order to “frame plans for the complete reorientation and retraining” of the SCS (Bogaars, 1973, p. 79). He elaborated on the rationale of these visits in his memoirs:

I was uneasy about taking power at the age of 35. I had no experience of administration . . . . I decided to acquaint myself with the structure of government and obtain an overview of the ministries. I wanted to get the feel of the senior staff, the nature of their work, their attitudes and work style so that I would know how much had to be changed if we were to solve our political, economic and social problems. I also wanted to assess the resources of each ministry and redeploy them so as to strengthen the most important. (Lee, 1998a, p. 328)

A systematic campaign to change the values of the civil servants was launched with the opening of the Political Study Center on 15 August 1959 by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In his opening address, Lee expressed the hope that the civil servants would change their “colonial mentality” once they were made aware of the problems facing Singapore. Prime Minister Lee said:

Some of you may be bewildered and perplexed by what you may consider the impatience with which we are asking for things to be done . . . . Whether an administration functions efficiently and smoothly in the interests of a small section of the people, depends upon the policies of the Ministers. But it is your responsibility to make sure that there is an efficient civil service . . . . We the elected Ministers have to work through you and with you to translate our plans and policies into reality. You should give of your best in the service of our people . . . . It is in our interest to show that under the system of ‘one man one vote’, there can be an honest and efficient government which works in the interest of the people. If we do not do our best, then we have only ourselves to blame when the people lose faith, not just in you the public service and we the democratic political leadership, but also in the democratic system of which you and I are working parts. And when they lose faith, then they have to look for other alternative forms of government . . . . It is our duty to see that the people are never confronted with such an alternative of despair (Lee, 1959, pp. 219–220).

The Political Study Center conducted a two-week part-time and non-residential political study course for senior civil servants to change their attitudes and to make them more aware of the local contextual constraints. In spite of the short duration and part-time, non-residential nature of its courses, the Center attained its objectives as “there was a gradual transformation in the [participants’] understanding and perception of the civil service of political matters and the issues which concerned the electorate and influenced Government policy” (Bogaars, 1973, p. 80). The common English-educated and middle-class background of the PAP leaders and the civil servants and the absence of fundamental cleavages between them contributed a great deal to the Political Study Center’s success (Quah, 1975a, p. 328).

Apart from the Political Study Center, the PAP government also relied on four other methods to change the attitudes and behavior of the civil servants.<sup>2</sup> The first method was the voluntary participation by civil servants in mass civic projects during the weekends to enable them to get better acquainted with the political leaders, and to provide them with an opportunity to engage in manual activities. These weekend activities were aimed at exposing the civil servants to other values and to improve their personal relationships with the political leaders. The attendance at these weekend sessions was quite good despite the fact that attendance was not

compulsory because the civil servants were afraid of being victimized for their non-participation (Seah, 1971, p. 86).

Second, the PAP government re-socialized the English-educated civil servants by recruiting non-English-educated graduates to reduce their predominance in the SCS and to correct the negative image of the SCS as “a preserve of the English-educated, and not representative of the local population” (Quah, 1975a, p. 329). The PAP government widened the scope of recruitment into the SCS to include graduates from the non-English streams also. This recruitment policy began in 1960, when 26 Nanyang University graduates were recruited for the education service and subordinate administrative grades in the SCS.<sup>3</sup>

Third, the PAP government introduced tougher disciplinary measures to deal with those civil servants found guilty of misconduct. In 1961, the Central Complaints Bureau (CCB) was formed to provide the non-English-educated public (which constituted the majority) with an opportunity to complain against those civil servants who had been rude or unfair in their interactions with them. If a complaint was valid, disciplinary action would be initiated against the guilty party. The CCB was also staffed with Chinese-educated personnel to make it more accessible to those members of the public with complaints against their English-educated counterparts (Quah, 1975a, pp. 330–331).

The fourth method employed by the PAP government in attitudinal reform was the policy of selective retention and retirement of senior civil servants. In practice, this meant that those expatriate civil servants who were competent and due for retirement were urged to stay on while their incompetent colleagues were retired prematurely. The combined impact of this policy and the reduction in the variable allowance resulted in a high turnover rate among the senior civil servants.

The focus on efficiency as the sole criterion for retaining or retiring a senior civil servant was reinforced by the de-emphasis on seniority as the basis for promotion. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew indicated his disdain for seniority thus:

I am in favor of efficient service. The brighter chap goes up and I don't care how many years he's been in or he hasn't been in. If he's the best man for the job, put him there.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, competent local civil servants were promoted to more responsible positions regardless of their seniority (Quah, 1975a, p. 331). This policy remains in force today and is responsible for the relative youthfulness of many of the current permanent secretaries.

In short, the PAP government's efforts in attitudinal reform "were aimed at breaking what it regarded to be an isolationist and anachronistic outlook of the Civil Service" (Seah, 1971, p. 88). The PAP leaders needed the support of the civil servants to implement the government's programs. But they also knew that they had to first demonstrate to the civil servants that they were firmly in control before the latter would give their support.

### **7.5. REDISTRIBUTION OF GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS, 1981–1985**

In early 1981, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew instructed the Management Services Department (MSD) to review the distribution of government functions among the ministries to ascertain how such functions could be redistributed more logically. The MSD team began its review by examining the organization of government functions in Britain, Canada, France, Japan, the United States, and West Germany. Since there were major differences in the way the functions were grouped together into ministries, the MSD team concluded that "it was not feasible for Singapore to emulate any of these countries because their organizational designs were based on different political and social philosophies" (Chuang et al., 1984, p. 2). Thus, Singapore had to design its own organizational structure to ensure consistency with its political and social philosophies and responsiveness to its aspirations and problems.

The MSD team based its recommendations on the following working principles:

The *rational* way of organizing government functions is to assign closely related functions to the same ministry. One ministry would therefore be distinctly and solely accountable for each major area of government concern. In addition, there should be a mechanism for overall coordination, control and review to ensure that policies and activities are congruent with each other and with national objectives. (Chuang, et al., 1984, p. 4)

On the basis of the above-mentioned working principles, the MSD team made three major recommendations. The first recommendation was to reduce the portfolio mix in those ministries with unrelated functions. For example, the former Ministry of Social Affairs had three functions which were not consistent with its main role such as the Fire and Emergency Ambulance Services, the licensing of money lenders and pawnbrokers, and the licensing of hotels and massage parlors. These functions were later transferred to other more appropriate ministries (Chuang, et al., 1984, pp. 4–5).

Secondly, the MSD team recommended that closely related functions in various ministries should be transferred to one ministry in order to avoid duplication of work, overlapping coverage, non-performance, or improper performance of related functions. When the Ministry of Science and Technology was dissolved on 1 April 1981, the functions of technical education and science promotion and five educational institutions were transferred to the Ministry of Education. The other functions of promoting research and development activities and the industrial application of science and technology were transferred to the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The Department of Scientific Services was transferred to the Ministry of Health. Similarly, responsibility for the Port of Singapore Authority and the Anti-Pollution Unit was transferred from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to the then Ministry of Communications and the Ministry of the Environment respectively (Chuang, et al., 1984, p. 5).

The final recommendation of the MSD team was to improve the central coordination of the activities of ministries and statutory boards in Singapore. Subsequently, the Head of the Civil Service or Permanent Secretary of the Public Service Division was also appointed as the Permanent Secretary (Special Duties) in the PMO "to coordinate Cabinet matters."

The MSD team submitted its main report to the prime minister on 24 June 1981. The report was then circulated by him to all the permanent secretaries. In January 1982, the Committee on Reorganization of Ministries (CRM) was formed to review the report and the comments of the permanent secretaries. On 6 December 1982, the CRM made recommendations to the prime minister on how the MSD's recommendations could be implemented. The prime minister accepted the CRM's recommendations the next day and many of the MSD's recommendations were implemented (Chuang, et al., 1984, p. 2). Thus, in January 1985, the Ministry of Community Development was formed by combining the related functions of the former Ministry of Culture and the former Ministry of Social Affairs.

## **7.6. REFORMS IN PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT, 1982–1988**

In April 1982, the PAP government announced its intention to change the SCS's personnel management philosophy from a task-centered to an employee-centered one, which would provide the civil servants with a sense of commitment and the opportunity to develop themselves to their fullest

potential. The rationale for this change was to ensure that the civil servants who were hired would be developed to their fullest potential and assigned to jobs that they would find satisfying. The government had also realized that an employee-centered personnel management philosophy was required for the SCS to attract, motivate, and retain talented individuals. A Personnel Management Steering Committee (PMSC) led by the PSC Chairman was appointed to implement this new philosophy in the SCS (Quah, 1984c, p. 302).

The PMSC requested the MSD to review the role and functions of the PSC as well as the Personnel Administration Branch (PAB) of the Budget Division to ascertain whether better direction and control of the SCS's personnel policies could be attained. The MSD found that, while the PSC and the PAB had consulted each other on a continuing basis, the sharing of the various personnel functions between them had given rise to such problems as divided policy direction and responsibilities, ambiguous definition of their respective roles, functions and authority, duplication of work, inadequate coordination, and inefficient use of manpower. To overcome these problems, the MSD recommended the establishment of another central authority – the Public Service Division (PSD) – to formulate and review personnel policies and to ensure that such policies would be uniformly implemented in all the ministries. The PAP government accepted the MSD's recommendation and the PSD was formed on 3 January 1983 as the third division within the Ministry of Finance (Quah, 1984c, pp. 302–303).<sup>5</sup>

In 1986, the PAP government initiated a manpower reduction exercise to reduce staff levels in the SCS by 10 percent over five years. This objective was attainable in view of the rationalization of departmental functions and activities, streamlining of work procedures, more extensive mechanization, automation and computerization, privatization, and contracting-out of work. As part of the exercise, all public sector organizations were requested by the Ministry of Finance to form manpower scrutiny teams to review their activities to improve manpower utilization and achieve a greater reduction in staff requirements. The purpose of each scrutiny was to ascertain whether the activity was necessary in the first place and, if so, whether it could be performed at lower cost and with less manpower. Training courses were organized by the MSD and the Auditor-General's Office to provide the local scrutiny teams with the expertise needed to review staff requirements (Quah, 1991, pp. 95–96).

A major consequence of the manpower scrutiny exercise was that it led to the zero-growth manpower policy. In 1988, the PAP government decided that ministries should work toward zero growth in total staff strength over the actual 1986 Financial Year level. During the same year, the PSC began

regulating recruitment to match attrition in order to achieve the zero-growth target in the SCS. The Budget Division calculated the ceiling recruitment figure (or recruitment target) for the various ministries for each year and informed them that no provision was made for additional manpower requirements arising from new functions and services or increases in workload as these needs were expected to be met by retraining and redeploying existing staff. However, subject to the limit set by the recruitment target, ministries were allowed to redistribute available vacancies across cost centers and programs (Quah, 1991, p. 96).

### **7.7. BUDGETARY REFORMS, 1978–1997**

When the PAP government assumed office in June 1959, it also inherited the line-item budgeting system (LIBS) from the British colonial government. As the “line-item” budget was based on “objects of expenditure,” its aim was to control expenditure at the departmental or agency level (Burkhead, 1956, pp. 127–128). The emphasis on accountability rather than performance meant that each ministry had to submit its annual expenditure budget on a “line-item” basis for evaluation to the Budget Division in the Ministry of Finance. Those proposals accepted by the Budget Division had to be approved by the Cabinet and Parliament. After receiving their budget allocations, all the ministries and departments had to be accountable for their expenditure within the approved amounts for each object and had “limited flexibility to vary the allocations for individual objects to meet changing priorities and circumstances” (Prasad, 1982, p. 1).

The LIBS had three advantages. First, it ensured that the Budget Division had centralized control over the expenditure of the ministries and departments. Second, unnecessary wastage of funds was prevented by the scrutiny of the financial items by Members of Parliament. The third advantage of the LIBS was the maintenance of accounting practices and the accountability of civil servants in the disbursement of funds. On the other hand, the LIBS’s three strengths were offset by these three weaknesses: there were no performance indicators to show that each bureau had utilized its resources properly; lack of emphasis on short-range and long-range planning in each bureau; and the absence of coordination between bureaus (Seah, 1973, pp. 27–28).

In 1982, Ajith Prasad, who was then Deputy Director in the Budget Division, had identified other shortcomings of the LIBS:

The line-item system emphasized the “things to be bought” but did not provide a formal mechanism for relating these to the “things to be done”. It, therefore, did not provide an

objective basis for preparing and evaluating the budget. Decisions on a new financial year's budget were based mainly on the current year's expenditure with increments for price increases. The implicit assumption behind this was that the existing level of government services and expenditures had been justified in previous years and did not need to be reviewed. The line-item approach thus did not require the Ministries to evaluate whether their activities were achieving objectives and goals in a cost-effective manner and even whether the activities were still relevant or needed. (Prasad, 1982, p. 1)

In view of these limitations of the LIBS, the Ministry of Finance appointed a United Nations expert, Eric Danecke, in 1972 to assess the desirability of introducing program budgeting in Singapore. Following Danecke's recommendation that program budgeting should be introduced "without delay" to the SCS, the Ministry of Finance conducted a trial run of a program budgeting system in mid-1974 in the Singapore Sports Council (Prasad, 1982, p. 2). This trial run showed that there were difficulties in formulating objective criteria and indicators for program evaluation (Prasad, 1982, p. 2).

In 1975, the Estimates Committee of Parliament recommended that the permanent secretary of each ministry should prepare an annual review of his ministry's performance during the past financial year because the budget proposals submitted by the ministries were not related to their work plans. The Ministry of Finance accepted this recommendation but it realized that the LIBS had to be replaced by the Program and Performance Budgeting System (PPBS) in order to implement this recommendation (Prasad, 1982, p. 2). Unlike the LIBS, PPBS was "more attuned to the budgetary requirements of a state whose spending outlays had rapidly increased to promote social and economic development" (Jones, 1998b, p. 285).

However, because of the lack of trained personnel in the Budget Division, the Ministry of Finance was cautious and replaced the LIBS with a limited version of PBBS in the SCS in 1978 after completing two trial runs in 1976 and 1977. The modified PBBS had these five features:

1. Systematic identification of the programs and activities necessary for achieving the goals, objectives, and targets of each ministry;
2. Formulation of each ministry's annual expenditure requirements by using such objective criteria as performance and workload statistics;
3. Evaluation of the ministries' expenditure requirements by the Budget Division using cost effectiveness, cost-benefit, and input-output criteria;
4. Periodic evaluation and monitoring of on-going programs; and
5. Provision of greater flexibility to ministries in the use of funds (Prasad, 1982, p. 2).

The PBBS lasted for 11 years and was replaced by the Block Vote Budget Allocation System (BVBAS) in April 1989. The purpose of introducing the BVBAS was to delegate greater authority to the ministries to manage their budget allocations. However, “centralized or top down control of macro-budgetary matters still rested with the Ministry of Finance, cabinet and parliament” including the determination of the total expenditure allowed for each ministry. Furthermore, after parliament’s approval of the budget, the permanent secretaries of the ministries can determine how the allocated funds are spent according to their ministries’ policies and objectives (Jones, 1998b, p. 287).

The BVBAS was a computerized system with four features. First, it was concerned with balancing the budget and provided an approach for implementing it. Second, it emphasized a top-down approach rather than a bottom-up approach in order to minimize the bargaining between the ministries and the Budget Division that was prevalent during the LIBS period (1959–1978) and the PPBS period (1978–1989). Third, unlike the LIBS and PPBS, the BVBAS allowed the permanent secretaries to manage because the ministries were given a great deal of autonomy in the management of voted funds and manpower resources. Thus, ministries could plan and implement their programs, projects, and activities according to their own priorities. The final feature of BVBAS was that, following the shift of emphasis from a control-oriented budget system (LIBS) to a management-oriented one (PPBS), the Ministry of Finance focused its attention on the performance of ministries by issuing broad guidelines and allowing the ministries “to develop more detailed control procedures to suit their own internal requirements” (Doh, 1990, pp. 18–26).

Unfortunately, the BVBAS did not change the mindset of civil servants toward an output-performance-based management system as performance management was not the impetus for change and improvement in the SCS (Kay, 1999, p. 17). A more serious limitation of the BVBAS was that its emphasis on inputs has resulted in “the half-hearted attempts of departments in tying inputs to outputs, as reflected in their reluctance, and the difficulty in measuring their performance or holding them accountable for any stipulated targets heightened further the need for reforms” (Kay, 1999, p. 18).

The Budgeting for Results (BFR) concept was introduced to the SCS on 6 July 1994 at a seminar organized by the Budget Division. More specifically, BFR is a management philosophy which provides “an administrative framework and a set of incentives” to motivate civil servants “to be efficient, performance oriented and entrepreneurial” (Budget Division, 1996, p. 1).

BFR was introduced to the SCS for two reasons: to enable Singapore “to stay ahead of the competition” in the “highly competitive global environment” and to “provide a high level of public services that will meet the expectations of Singaporeans” (Budget Division, 1996, p. 1). In other words, the implementation of BFR would enable the SCS to achieve these aims by enhancing the accountability of civil servants and giving ministries and departments more autonomy for attaining their goals.

On 28 February 1996, the Minister for Finance, Richard Hu, announced that the SCS would be restructured according to the BFR system so that ministries and departments would be managed as autonomous agencies. More importantly, he stressed that BFR’s basic tenet was that each autonomous agency would be given “considerable autonomy in financial and personnel management in exchange for greater accountability for producing results with the public money allocated to them.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, autonomous agencies and BFR were introduced in the SCS during 1996–1997 to enhance its autonomy without sacrificing accountability.

BFR has four important features. First, the autonomous agencies are required to pre-specify their output and performance targets to be achieved with their budgetary allocations. Second, there is a shift in the budgetary process from an input-driven to an output-driven one. Third, autonomous agencies are provided with incentives to achieve greater operational efficiency by allowing them to retain a portion of their excess revenue if they meet or exceed their output targets. Fourth, permanent secretaries are given “maximum flexibility in personnel and financial matters within the agreed budget.”<sup>7</sup>

The Budget Division implemented BFR progressively over a two-year period to convert all ministry headquarters, departments, and statutory boards into autonomous agencies (Budget Division, 1996, p. 4). Accordingly, on 1 April 1996, 11 departments and 3 ministry headquarters were commissioned as autonomous agencies during the first phase of implementing BFR in the SCS (Table 7.2). The performance review of these agencies in 1997 found that seven of these autonomous agencies had achieved “at least 85 percent of all agreed target levels set out in their output plans” (Budget Division, 1997, p. 4). The successful implementation of the pilot phase of the BFR framework in the 14 agencies led to its extension to the rest of the SCS in the second phase with the inclusion of 113 autonomous agencies in April 1997. However, the Ministry of Defense and the Internal Security Department were excluded for national security reasons (Kay, 1999, p. 12).<sup>8</sup> These agencies performed well as “80 percent met at least 50 percent of their targets, while 22 percent managed to achieve all the targets they have set” (Budget Division, 1998, p. 5).

**Table 7.2.** Autonomous Agencies in the Singapore Civil Service in 1996.

Ministry	Departments
Ministry of Communications	Meteorological Service Department
Ministry of Community Development	Registry of Marriages
Ministry of Finance	Budget Division Headquarters, Accountant-General's Department, Revenue Division Headquarters, Registry of Companies and Businesses
Ministry of Health	Institute of Science and Forensic Medicine, Tampines Polyclinic, Toa Payoh Polyclinic
Ministry of Home Affairs	National Registration Department, Singapore Immigration
Ministry of Labor	Occupational Safety and Health (Training and Promotion) Centre
Ministry of Law	Survey Department
Prime Minister's Office	Public Service Division

Source: Budget Division (1997, p. 3).

It should be noted that BFR is based on the United Kingdom's Financial Management Initiative. However, the autonomous agencies in Singapore differ from the executive agencies in the United Kingdom and the operational departments in two important respects. First, unlike the limited involvement of their counterparts in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, the permanent secretaries in the SCS remain responsible for the financial and personnel management of their ministries. The second difference is that the SCS does not use employment contracts to evaluate the performance of the heads of the autonomous agencies. Rather, the SCS relies on the "surplus retention strategy" as the major mechanism for improving performance but the remuneration of the department directors or chief executives is "governed centrally and not tied to their autonomous agencies' performance" (Kay, 1999, pp. 13–14).

Unlike other countries, the budgetary reforms introduced in Singapore are not motivated by fiscal considerations as there have been budgetary surpluses since 1988. Singapore was described as "an oasis in budgeting" by Doh Joon Chien in 1996 because it had an annual budget surplus from 1965 to 1993 except for 1987 (Doh, 1996, p. 235). On the contrary, according to David Seth Jones:

The essential purpose of the recent budgetary reforms in the Singapore public service is to make its managers more concerned with the results of their programs, as measured in the quantity and quality of services, whilst ensuring more efficient use of resources. (Jones, 1998b, p. 303)

## 7.8. EVALUATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS IN SINGAPORE

The PAP government inherited a hostile and corrupt public bureaucracy when it assumed office in June 1959. Accordingly, the PAP leaders were forced to introduce comprehensive reforms to reorganize the SCS and to change the attitudes of the civil servants in order to ensure their political survival and to keep their electoral promises. They realized that they had to co-opt the civil servants as partners to ensure the effective implementation of public policies. Singapore's rapid economic growth and development during the past 50 years and its image as an effective city-state indicate that the comprehensive reforms introduced in 1960 have been effective.

The redistribution of government functions during 1981–1985 was a necessary and important reform because it made the organization of functions in the SCS more rational and logical by transferring closely related functions in different ministries to reduce duplication and overlapping of functions, and improving the coordination of activities among the ministries and statutory boards. Similarly, the reforms in personnel management introduced during 1982–1988 were very timely as the shift from a task-centered to an employee-centered personnel management philosophy in 1982 was a move in the right direction. The PSD's establishment in 1983 to share the burden of personnel management with the PSC was also correct and has enhanced the efficiency of both organizations. The introduction of the manpower scrutiny exercise in 1987 and the resultant zero-growth manpower policy have also enabled the SCS to keep trim and to avoid overstaffing.

Unlike the Philippines, which has changed its budgeting system to follow the latest budget innovation in the United States, the process of reforming the budget in Singapore has been slow and measured. For example, the change from the LIBS to performance budgeting, PPBS, and zero-base budgeting in the United States, was swiftly imitated each time by the Philippines. Unfortunately, this simplistic imitation of the United States' experience in budgeting has not benefited the Philippines because the change in the type of budget was not accompanied by a corresponding change in the orientation of the bureaucrats implementing the reforms. Thus, for budgetary reform to be effective, emphasis must be paid to both its form or type of budget and its substance or the orientation and attitudes of the budget officials and other civil servants.

Doh Joon Chien has described Singapore's approach to budgetary modernization as "an unhurried one, marked by caution and, to a large

extent, internal dynamics” (Doh, 1990, p. 9). However, he does not explain why Singapore is unique in this respect. Singapore was unusually slow in jumping on the budget innovation bandwagon for two reasons. First, unlike the Philippines, Singapore was a former British colony and was therefore influenced more by Britain than the United States. The LIBS adopted by the PAP government in 1959 was a relic of the British colonial era. The second and more important reason is that administrative reform in Singapore is a long and continuous process. It took nearly two decades before the LIBS was replaced by the PPBS in the SCS in April 1978. Similarly, the BVBAS was implemented in April 1989, exactly 11 years after the introduction of the PPBS. Unlike its predecessors, the BVBAS was short-lived and was replaced by BFR after seven years in April 1996.

The *raison d’être* for introducing the BVBAS was clearly to minimize the unpleasant bargaining between the ministries and the Budget Division that was prevalent during both the LIBS period (1959–1978) and the PPBS period (1978–1989). Unlike PPBS, which was borrowed from the United States, the inspiration for introducing BVBAS came from the Ministry of Defense in Singapore, which had been allocated six percent of the gross domestic product annually since the attainment of independence in August 1965. Unfortunately, BVBAS was ineffective as it failed to change the mindset of civil servants toward performance management and its emphasis on inputs made the departments reluctant to measure their performance. In contrast, BFR has been more effective in providing the SCS and its 113 autonomous agencies greater autonomy without sacrificing accountability.

Singapore’s approach to administrative reform is characterized by five features. First, unlike many other countries, both institutional and attitudinal aspects of administrative reform are emphasized as the reorganization of the SCS has also been accompanied by the attitudinal reorientation of the civil servants. Second, the goals of the reforms are clearly stated as the improvement of the SCS’s effectiveness to enhance its contribution to the attainment of national development goals. Third, Singapore adopts a pragmatic approach to administrative reform by relying on improving organizational capabilities and reducing organizational workload and on both comprehensive and incremental reform strategies. Fourth, Singapore’s policy context is conducive for administrative reform because of the absence of obstacles in view of its small size, its low level of corruption, and the support and sponsorship of the reforms by the political leaders. Finally, Singapore’s experience in administrative reform has clearly shown that the support and sponsorship of the reform effort by the political leaders is an indispensable prerequisite for successful administrative reform.

In sum, administrative reform in Singapore is successful because of the dual emphasis on the institutional and attitudinal aspects, its clearly stated goal of enhancing national development, its pragmatic approach of relying on both comprehensive and incremental strategies, the absence of obstacles to reform, and strong political support and sponsorship for the reforms.

### NOTES

1. The three reasons for creating these statutory boards are discussed in Chapter 4.
2. For a detailed discussion of these methods, see Seah, (1971, pp. 86–89).
3. The language of instruction used in Nanyang University was Mandarin.
4. *Malay Mail*, 9 July 1961, quoted in Seah (1971, p. 88).
5. For a more detailed analysis of the origins and functions of the PSD, see Chapter 5.
6. “Greater Autonomy for Higher Efficiency,” *Straits Times*, 29 February 1996.
7. For a detailed analysis of these features, see Budget Division (1996, pp. 1–4).
8. The 113 autonomous agencies are listed in Koh (1997).

# CHAPTER 8

## IMPLEMENTING PS21 IN THE SINGAPORE CIVIL SERVICE

The goal of PS21 is transformation of the Singapore Public Service, from reactivity to proactivity, from a satisfaction with the present to a questioning of the future. This demands a change in approach, values, and culture . . . The Public Service must go from being a mere service provider and regulator to being a catalyst for change . . .

– Lim (1998, pp. 127–128, 131)

### 8.1. OBJECTIVES OF PS21

In May 1995, the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) launched “Public Service for the 21st Century” (PS21) for two reasons:

1. To nurture an attitude of service excellence in meeting the needs of the public with high standards of quality, courtesy, and responsiveness.
2. To foster an environment which induces and welcomes continuous change for greater efficiency and effectiveness by employing modern management tools and techniques while paying attention to the morale and welfare of public officers (PS21 Office, 2005).

PS21 is the most comprehensive administrative reform to be introduced in Singapore as it is “an extension of existing schemes and campaigns” such as Work Improvement Teams (WITs), Suggestions, Service Improvement, Staff Welfare, Organizational Review, Public Contact Improvement, Courtesy, Healthy Lifestyle, Zero Manpower Growth, Productivity, and so on (Prime Minister’s Office, 1995, p. 2).

Apart from being the most comprehensive reform, PS21 is also the most ambitious in terms of its second objective of creating an environment that encourages and welcomes continuous change. What is the impact of PS21 on the SCS and its members? The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate PS21 in terms of its two objectives. Has the introduction of PS21 improved service in the SCS and the civil servants’ attitudes toward change? This chapter

contends that while PS21 has succeeded in improving the quality of service provided by the SCS and enhancing the emphasis given to training, it has not been able to foster an environment that encourages and welcomes continuous change in the SCS.

## 8.2. RATIONALE FOR INTRODUCING PS21

Why was PS21 introduced? When the permanent secretaries initiated PS21 on 5 May 1995 to prepare the SCS for the 21st century, Lim Siong Guan, who was then Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, and the prime mover behind PS21, described PS21 as "the label we have given to the stance the Public Service must take in the face of an unpredictable future." PS21 is "basically a change about change – not a change to a specific final state but an acceptance of the need for change as a permanent state" (Lim, 1998, p. 125). On the other hand, David S. Jones has described PS21 as "a detailed mission statement and program of action, which maps out the future of the Singapore Public Service" (Jones, 1997, p. 76). The PS21 website describes PS21 as "the Singapore Public Service's commitment to Anticipate, Welcome and Execute change, influencing developments in order to provide Singapore with the right conditions for success."<sup>1</sup>

In his paper on "The Public Service," which was presented at "The Year in Review 1995" annual conference organized by the Institute of Policy Studies in Singapore on 22 January 1996, Lim Siong Guan noted that the SCS had to be responsive to "a public that is increasingly demanding higher standards of service" and an "increasingly outward-oriented" economy. Accordingly, the "Public Service must not only change in step with developments in Singapore society and the international environment, but also move ahead to point and lead the way forward, create, and facilitate programs for national growth, and be a model for efficiency, innovation and service quality" (Lim, 1996, p. 36).

In the past, civil servants served as regulators and provided the services and set the standards. As such, members of the public had no choice but to tolerate whatever standards the SCS had set if they wanted the services. However, David K.L. Ma, former Director of the Institute of Public Administration and Management, contended that the situation had changed because of "a higher educated and a more demanding public" and "the advent of a knowledge based economy" (Ma, 2000, p. 137).

Furthermore, the demand for quality service can be attributed to three factors. First, the rising affluence and spread of education have increased the public's expectations of the SCS's performance. Second, to compete for

talent and investment, the SCS has to enhance Singapore's competitiveness by "simplifying rules and procedures, and by reducing business costs." Third, as civil servants have become more sensitive to the need to uphold the SCS's reputation as an efficient and effective service provider, "this strong internal desire to excel has become the most important driving force for quality service" (Ma, 2000, pp. 137–138).

In his 1995 paper, Lim Siong Guan elaborated on the rationale of PS21 by discussing "some of the more fundamental concepts behind PS21." First, the intent of PS21 is for the SCS to be at the forefront or "at the head of the pack in seeking continuous empowerment and innovation." This means that the SCS should be transformed by PS21 to be "a catalyst for change, a standard bearer and a pace setter." Second, "to be in time for the future," PS21 must enable the SCS to welcome, anticipate, and execute change. According to him:

Welcoming change is opening mental windows to see change as opportunity rather than threat, with PS21 adopting the approach of making everyone an "activist" for change and improvement. Anticipating change is accepting the unpredictability of the future but being prepared for alternative landscapes, the instrument PS21 uses being scenario-based planning. . . . And executing change is superior management of people and resources, of hope and fear, of penalty and reward. (Lim, 1996, p. 39)

Finally, Lim stressed that PS21's approach is "one of evolution in execution but revolution in results." He further admitted that "there is some way yet to go in internalizing the demands of PS21 in public servants" as "changes are quietly, possibly even subconsciously, taking place." Another obstacle is that "some people find it difficult to see the sense or value of programs that deal with processes rather than with specific tangible end goals." Teaching civil servants to "fish" is "obviously superior to giving them fish" but some observers "have difficulty appreciating the point of teaching 'fishing' in the Public Service through PS21" (Lim, 1996, pp. 39–40).

### **8.3. COMPONENTS OF PS21**

The permanent secretaries identified four priority areas such as staff well-being, WITs and Staff Suggestion Scheme (SSS), quality service, and organizational review. For staff well-being, emphasis was given to the personal needs of the civil servants in order to enhance their psychological and physical welfare and improve their motivation and morale. The aim of WITs and the SSS is to encourage innovation and learning among civil servants by providing them with opportunities to introduce changes into

their working environments. The commitment to quality service is manifested in the introduction of measures to improve counter services and the performance of counter staff in the SCS. Finally, organizational structures and procedures will be constantly reviewed to ensure efficiency, reduce red tape, and maximize effectiveness (Jones, 1997, pp. 77–79).

To implement and manage PS21, there is the Central PS21 Committee, which consists of all the permanent secretaries and is chaired by the Head of the SCS. Below the Central PS21 Committee, there are four functional committees, each chaired by a permanent secretary and includes representatives from all the ministries. Table 8.1 provides the details of the four PS21 functional committees and their specific terms of reference. The Public Service Division (PSD) has a PS21 Office to provide secretariat support to the Central PS21 Committee. The four functional committees have developed measurements in their respective areas. Periodic surveys have also been conducted to assess the effectiveness of PS21 in changing attitudes among the civil servants and the public perception of the SCS (Prime Minister's Office, 1995, pp. 6–7).

The immediate impact of PS21 is the plethora of quality service initiatives undertaken by the SCS to meet the needs of citizens and the business community. These initiatives are characterized by the overall quality service framework of CARE, which symbolizes Courtesy, Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Effectiveness (Ma, 2000, p. 138). These four features are defined thus:

Courtesy: providing e-government services in the most user-friendly, speedy, and convenient way that minimizes the effort to obtain the services.

Accessibility: providing convenient and easy access to e-government service, “anytime–anywhere” if possible.

**Table 8.1.** Terms of Reference for the PS21 Functional Committees.

Functional Committee	Terms of Reference
PS21 Staff Well-being Committee	To promote policies and programs that provide for the well-being of public servants
PS21 Quality Service Committee	To promote quality service in meeting the needs of the public as well as the internal customers
PS21 WITs and Suggestions Committee	To foster positive attitudes toward change and an environment which seeks continuous improvement
PS21 Organizational Review Committee	To examine organizational structures and procedures for greater effectiveness and efficiency

Source: Prime Minister's Office (1995, p. 6).

Responsiveness: delivering services promptly with minimal bureaucracy.

Effectiveness: effectively meeting the public need in a secure and reliable manner without creating complexity in the process. (Tan & Yong, 2003, p. 218)

## **8.4. SETTING SERVICE STANDARDS IN THE SCS**

With the advent of PS21, all government agencies have pledged to provide excellent service by setting and publishing their performance standards. For example, the Singapore Police Force (SPF) has pledged to answer emergency calls within 10 seconds at least 90 percent of the time, to arrive at urgent incident sites within 15 minutes and non-urgent ones within 30 minutes at least 85 percent of the time, to respond to letters from the public within five working days at least 90 percent of the time, and to update victims of crime on the outcome of cases within 28 days at least 90 percent of the time (Singapore Police Force, 1999, p. 38). Table 8.2 shows that the SPF has exceeded the targets for these indicators from 1997 to 2002.

In his assessment of the SPF's service standards, Paul Lim concluded that "there is no doubt that the SPF has to a large extent achieved the first objective of Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21), that is, to provide quality service and nurture an attitude of service excellence among its members" (Lim, 2004, pp. 44–46). However, he pointed out that during 1997–2002, the SPF had received 1,379 complaints and 189 compliments even after the implementation of the Service Pledge in 1997 (Lim, 2004, p. 33). More importantly, he found that, while the SPF's performance in providing services to the public is good, it is however, "trailing behind the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) in the provision of services to its customers, though it has been doing better than the New Zealand Police Force (NZPF)" (Lim, 2004, p. 46).

However, more recent data show that the SPF has further improved on the attainment of the targets of its service pledge. The SPF revised the second target for responding to urgent incidents from 85 percent to 87 percent, and the third target for responding to non-urgent incidents from 85 percent to 90 percent. Table 8.3 shows that from 2005 to 2007, the SPF has exceeded its first, fourth, and fifth targets by an average of 6.92 percent, 9.89 percent, and 9.99 percent, respectively. On the other hand, the SPF's performance exceeded the revised second and third targets by 4.16 percent and 3.75 percent, respectively.

**Table 8.2.** SPF's Service Pledge Statistics, 1997–2002.

	Answering '999' Calls	Responding to Urgent Incidents	Responding to Non-urgent Incidents	Replying to Letters from the Public	Updating Crime Victims on Outcome of Cases
Target	90%	85%	85%	90%	90%
1997 results	94.8%	92%	94%	99.6%	94.6%
	(+ 4.8%)	(+ 7%)	(+ 9%)	(+ 9.6%)	(+ 4.6%)
1998 results	92.5%	87.5%	91.8%	99.2%	98.8%
	(+ 2.5%)	(2.5%)	(+ 6.8%)	(+ 9.2%)	(+ 8.8%)
1999 results	91.6%	88.9%	94.7%	99.7%	99.1%
	(+ 1.6%)	(+ 3.9%)	(+ 9.7%)	(+ 9.7%)	(+ 9.1%)
2000 results	92.4%	94.1%	97.1%	99.8%	99.5%
	(+ 2.4%)	(+ 9.1%)	(+ 12.1%)	(+ 9.8%)	(+ 9.5%)
2001 results	98.7%	94.4%	96.8%	99.5%	99.9%
	(+ 8.7%)	(+ 9.4%)	(+ 11.8%)	(+ 9.5%)	(+ 9.9%)
2002 results	97.9%	80.3%	94.8%	99.8%	99.9%
	(+ 7.9%)	(+ 5.3%)	(+ 9.8%)	(+ 9.8%)	(+ 9.9%)
Average target exceeded	4.65%	6.20%	9.87%	9.60%	8.63%

*Note:* The percentages within brackets indicate the extent to which the annual targets have been exceeded.

*Sources:* Compiled from data provided in [Singapore Police Force \(1999\)](#) and [Singapore Police Force \(2004\)](#).

**Table 8.3.** SPF's Service Pledge Statistics, 2005–2007.

	Answering '999' Calls	Responding to Urgent Incidents	Responding to Non-urgent incidents	Replying to Letters from the Public	Updating Crime Victims on Outcome of Cases
Target	90%	87%	90%	90%	90%
2005 results	96.91%	91.14%	94%	99.96%	99.98%
	(+ 6.91%)	(+ 4.14%)	(+ 4.00%)	(+ 9.96%)	(+ 9.98%)
2006 results	95.94%	90.89%	93.55%	99.79%	100%
	(+ 5.94%)	(+ 3.89%)	(+ 3.55%)	(+ 9.79%)	(+ 10%)
2007 results	97.91%	91.44%	93.70%	99.93%	100%
	(+ 7.91%)	(+ 4.44%)	(+ 3.70%)	(+ 9.93%)	(+ 10%)
Average target exceeded (2005–2007)	6.92%	4.16%	3.75%	9.89%	9.99%
Average target exceeded (1997–2001)	4.65%	6.20%	9.86%	9.60%	8.63%

*Sources:* Compiled from data provided in [Singapore Police Force \(2008\)](#) and [Singapore Police Force \(2009\)](#).

A second example is provided by the Singapore Immigration and Registration Department which promised to issue identity cards within seven working days upon request and make the change of address within 10 minutes. Similarly, the Registry of Companies and Businesses pledged to process 98 percent of applications for registration of new companies within 10 minutes (Ma, 2000, p. 138).

The exercise of setting service standards has enhanced quality control and encouraged the public to give feedback “when the standards are not met or when they feel that the standards are too low.” Civil servants are required to review the way they work to raise their service standards. Thus, through a review process, the Ministry of Manpower has shortened the time it needed to process the claims for workmen’s compensation from five months to one month. By centralizing all the applications for factory registration instead of processing them according to industries, the Department of Industrial Safety has reduced the registration process from two months to two weeks (Ma, 2000, pp. 138–139).

## **8.5. INTEGRATING THE SCS**

To improve the delivery of services to the public, the SCS has introduced the following projects and initiatives.

### *8.5.1. eCitizen Center*

In April 1999 the SCS launched the eCitizen Center, which is a “one-stop, non-stop virtual Public Services Center focused on the needs of citizens” that is accessible on the Internet (Richter, Cornford, & McLoughlin, 1999, p. 12). The eCitizen portal enables users to “search for and access a diversity of information from government agencies and to conduct a wide range of transactions online with government agencies.”<sup>2</sup> Designed for every citizen, the eCitizen Center focuses on important transitions in a person’s life journey like birth, education, marriage, and unemployment, during which a citizen has to interact with the SCS. The advantages of eCitizen Center are manifold: apart from saving citizens the inconvenience of dealing with many agencies, they are not required to know which agency to contact as they can access the website to select the services needed (Ma, 2000, p. 139).

The eCitizen Center was originally organized in terms of nine towns or groupings: Business, Defense, Education, Employment, Family, Health,

Housing, Law and Order, and Transport. In case of a citizen wishing to purchase a house or apartment, all the relevant information are provided in the Housing Town. Detailed instructions are provided on the procedures to be followed and the documents required. Answers are also given to frequently asked questions and application forms can be downloaded and submitted online. More than 30 government agencies participated in the eCitizen Center, either as town owners or as service or information providers and they offered more than 100 services online.

The eCitizen Center or Portal was reorganized on 17 October 2001 into 14 towns and the number of e-services was increased from 380 to 540.<sup>3</sup> By May 2002, more than 70 percent of all the public services that could be delivered electronically were already online.<sup>4</sup> “My eCitizen,” which is a personalized version of eCitizen, was introduced to enable citizens “to customize the staggering 1,600 e-services available to suit their preferences” (Yong & Lim, 2003, p. 307). Currently, the eCitizen Portal is organized according to these seven categories: Culture, Recreation and Sports; Defense and Security; Education, Learning and Employment; Family and Community Development; Health and Environment; Housing; and Transport and Travel.<sup>5</sup> The eCitizen Portal had initially received an average of 100,000 visitors a month (Ma, 2000, p. 139). The feedback on the enhanced eCitizen Portal was positive as “visitors have found it comprehensive, convenient, well-designed, and user-friendly.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that the average number of hits per month has increased from 1.2 million in May 2002 to 4.2 million in September 2002, and to 8.7 million in February 2003 (Tan & Yong, 2003, p. 225; Yong & Lim, 2003, p. 307). On the basis of the Internet usage of over 1.5 million Singapore Internet users, who visited over 10,000 local websites in 2005, the eCitizen portal won an award for being the most popular government services website at the 2006 Hitwise Online Performance Award ceremony in Singapore.<sup>7</sup>

#### 8.5.2. MARINET

MARINET was introduced by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore in April 1999 to provide ships calling at the port of Singapore with these four services: sending statutory declarations to the Port Authority online; shipping agents can use the system to order pilot and towage services; port-users can access MARINET for information on the arrival, departure, and location of vessels; and bunker suppliers can send their

monthly returns to the Port Authority. MARINET, which has more than 1,600 subscribers from over 400 companies in the shipping industry, handles an average of 350,000 transactions in a month (Ma, 2000, p. 140).

### *8.5.3. Using e-Government to Improve Service and Transparency*

The SCS has been relying on e-government to improve services to the public. For example, the use of e-filing for income tax returns by the Internal Revenue Authority of Singapore from 1998 and e-flat for the purchase of public housing apartments from 2000 have saved citizens time and effort in their interactions with the SCS as they can conduct their transactions any time and even when they are abroad, and without the inconvenience of queuing or physically traveling to multiple agencies. By 2002, 808,000 taxpayers or 52 percent of all taxpayers in Singapore had used e-filing for their income tax returns (Tan & Yong, 2003, p. 224). Applicants for public housing apartments who use the e-flat system are informed within a week of the outcome of their applications. Hence, it is not surprising that soon after its introduction, about 20 percent of new flat applications received by the Housing and Development Board were submitted through e-flat (HDB, 2000, p. 8).

The SCS also relies on e-government to enhance transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption by simplifying the procedures for obtaining business licenses. The On-line Applications System for Integrated Services (OASIS) was launched in 2004 to enable the public to “apply, renew, or terminate 85 different types of licenses” online. Similarly, to reduce the opportunities for corruption and improve efficiency and transparency in procurement, the online procurement portal known as *GeBiz* was introduced to enable government procurement to be done through the internet (Soh, 2008b, p. 7).

In short, the strategic use of e-government has enabled government agencies in Singapore to provide higher quality and more efficient service to the public and has also resulted in savings in costs to these agencies and a higher degree of transparency in the procedures for applying for business licenses (Ma, 2000, p. 140). According to Karen Wong, Director of the e-Government Programs and Policies Division in the Government Chief Information Office, Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, “e-Government has become the primary interface between the Government and Singapore’s citizens and businesses” (Wong, 2008, p. 37).

#### *8.5.4. The Home Team*

In 1995 the Minister for Home Affairs, Wong Kan Seng, introduced the concept of “the Home Team” to provide an integrated and seamless service among its nine agencies: its headquarters, the Internal Security Department, the SPF, the Singapore Civil Defense Force, the Singapore Prisons Service, the Central Narcotics Bureau, the Singapore Immigration and Registration, the Commercial and Industrial Security Corporation, and the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises. Wong elaborated on the Home Team concept in the following way:

The competence of each department is high. By themselves, they do very well, whether in fighting fires or dealing with crime or drug traffickers or illegal immigrants. But I thought that more synergy will lead to greater strength with the common objective of keeping Singapore safe and secure. This is the same mission for all departments. The Home Team concept brings together different departments, different traditions, built at different times. It took some time, but the various departments have come to understand the importance and usefulness of working together. There is a comfort level in working together now.<sup>8</sup>

By moving away from the traditional approach of each agency emphasizing its own roles and responsibilities, the Home Team officers focus on the outcome to be achieved as a team and perform many functions so that citizens do not have to deal with several agencies. In other words, the nine agencies in the Home Team improve the services provided to the public by working together as a team (Ma, 2000, p. 140).

#### *8.5.5. Customer Service Center*

The SCS has also provided integrated services through the establishment of customer service centers. For example, the Ministry of Education set up a customer service center known as eduMALL in July 1998 to provide teachers and members of the public with a one-stop access to educational resources and services. More specifically, eduMALL consists of four components:

1. Lobby: which provides reviews of the latest educational software;
2. Teachers’ Network: which enables teachers to support each other through collaboration and professional dialogue;
3. eduLibrary: which provides members of the public with details of the approved list of textbooks and program schedules for the Educational

Television programs. Teachers can find sample lesson plans, check the availability of specific learning resources, source educational software, or check useful websites; and

4. eduPlex: which enables principals and teachers to review materials on workshops conducted for implementing the Masterplan for Informational Technology in Education.<sup>9</sup>

A second example is provided by the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Board, which has set up e-Customer Counters at its main office and two branch offices to enable its members to check their CPF accounts or other services. Alternatively, CPF members can also access the CPF website from their home or office to perform various transactions online.<sup>10</sup>

## **8.6. WORKING WITH THE GROUND**

While strong leadership is important for enhancing its effectiveness, the SCS realizes the need to shift away from a top-down approach by ensuring that citizens can provide feedback on “what they want and what needs to be done.” Such feedback is important because as customers, members of the public know their needs better; and as citizens, they are expected to have a sense of ownership by providing suggestions for improvement (Ma, 2000, p. 141). The following schemes provide members of the public with ample opportunities for making suggestions.

### *8.6.1. Excellence in Public Suggestions Award*

The SCS initiated a nation-wide public suggestion scheme known as the Excellence in Public Suggestions Award in September 1997. The aim of this scheme was to recognize and reward members of the public who provided suggestions for improving the SCS. Awards are given every year to the best suggestions considered to be worthy of adoption (Ma, 2000, p. 141).

### *8.6.2. The Enterprise Challenge (TEC)*

This scheme was launched in March 2000 with the assistance of the Ministry of Finance, which provided a sum of S\$10 million as seed money. The purpose of TEC is “to encourage creativity, innovation and enterprise”

among Singaporeans and to “spark, develop and fund initiatives that can create new value for the Public Service and fundamentally improve the delivery of public service.”<sup>11</sup> Anyone with good ideas on improving public services could apply to a panel of members from the public and private sectors for funding. During its first three months, the panel received more than 120 proposals and awarded S\$1 million for the development of three proposals (Ma, 2000, p. 141).

### *8.6.3. Community Safety and Security Program*

The Home Team of the Ministry of Home Affairs introduced the Community Safety and Security Program (CSSP) in October 1997 to mobilize the residents, grassroots leaders, and Home Team officers to identify and address the safety and security concerns of various neighborhood precincts in Singapore. The CSSP has provided the community with the ownership of solutions to its problems and has enhanced its sense of safety and security. More than 450 grassroots organizations have participated in the CSSP by May 2000 (Ma, 2000, p. 141).

### *8.6.4. Regular Dialogues*

As part of Singapore 21, citizens are encouraged to participate actively in national affairs (Singapore 21 committee, 1999, p. 11). Accordingly, government agencies have organized regular dialogues with their customers. A survey of the ministries has shown that they have met regularly with more than 300 groups of customers. Some ministries have also conducted focus group discussions to gauge the public response to proposed new services before launching these services. David Ma has argued that these “proactive efforts, together with the regular review of rules and regulations, ensure that the services provided to the public are relevant” (Ma, 2000, p. 142).

Since 2005, the Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home (REACH) website (<http://www.reach.gov.sg>) provides citizens with online channels including discussion forums, online chats, blogs, and emails, in order to obtain public feedback and to facilitate discussion on government policies. REACH also organizes an annual eTownhall discussion through its online chat facility to enable citizens to conduct real-time discussions with politicians after the release of the Budget Speech (Wong, 2008, p. 36).

#### *8.6.5. Work Improvement Teams and Staff Suggestion Scheme*

In 1981, the Committee on Productivity recommended, among other things, the introduction of quality control circles (QCCs) in the SCS so that their benefits could be enjoyed by civil servants. The acronym WITs was suggested as QCCs had industrial implications and inappropriate for the SCS. Thus, WITs is the SCS's adaptation of the QCC concept and their birth can be traced to the first meeting of the Central Productivity Steering Committee on 28 September 1981 (Ng, 1990, p. 184). The WITs movement in the SCS was launched on 7 October 1981 with the creation of a WITs Development Unit to promote, monitor, and provide training for WITs facilitators, leaders and members.

As WITs consist of small voluntary groups of civil servants of different ranks from the same work units, they are formed for three reasons: (1) to enhance the quality of work life in the SCS by improving job satisfaction and the work environment, and promoting teamwork and human relations among civil servants; (2) to increase the SCS's performance by improving its quality of service, productivity, and teamwork; and (3) to motivate civil servants by making their work more meaningful through giving recognition, providing challenges, having more open and effective communications, and developing more positive work attitudes (Ng, 1990, p. 188).

From September 1981 to July 1990, 7,800 WITs were formed in the SCS, with 23,000 completed projects, and training was provided for 2,000 WITs facilitators and 1,700 WITs leaders.<sup>12</sup> During April to December 1999, the 11,691 WITs in the SCS completed 14,228 projects and saved the SCS more than S\$84 million. During the same period, civil servants contributed more than 520,000 suggestions to the SSS. The implementation of 60 percent of these suggestions resulted in a savings of S\$115 million to the SCS (Ma, 2000, p. 142). The total cost savings from the WITs program increased to S\$165 million in 2002.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in addition to cost savings, these improvements have enhanced the standard of service to the public.

## **8.7. TRAINING AND RECOGNITION OF CIVIL SERVANTS**

First, PS21 has improved training in the SCS with the implementation of a new training policy in November 1996 which entitled every civil servant to a minimum of 100 hours of training a year or 12.5 days (with eight hours of

training daily) by 2000. Responding to a suggestion that the number of training hours for a civil servant should be between 75 and 100 hours, the Public Service Division clarified that “the 100 hours is not a mandatory target” but a guideline. Furthermore, a civil servant is entitled to 100 hours of training per year and his supervisor cannot prohibit him from attending courses within this limit. However, a civil servant will not be penalized if he cannot attain the 100 hours of training in a year. Another important consideration is that the entitlement of 100 training hours per year for each civil servant is subject to the budgetary constraints of the agency concerned. This policy gave a tremendous boost to training in the SCS as only 40 hours or five days were devoted to training in 1996.<sup>14</sup>

Second, a Counter Allowance Scheme was introduced in August 1995 to encourage counter staff to provide good customer service and to recognize those civil servants who have given superior customer service. To qualify for this allowance, which ranges from 5 percent and 10 percent of a civil servant’s monthly salary, civil servants are required to attend the prescribed training program, to pass the test, and obtain positive evaluation of their performance from their supervisors and customers (Ma, 2000, pp. 142–143). Surveys conducted have indicated that the Counter Allowance Scheme has been successful in “giving greater recognition to the difficulties counter staff faced in dealing with the public, in equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge and, above all, in providing better services to the public” (Ma, 2000, p. 143).

## 8.8. PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTING WITS

The SCS did not encounter any problems in the various PS21 initiatives to improve customer service. However, unlike the first objective of nurturing an attitude of service excellence in the SCS, the second objective of PS21, which is the creation of an environment which induces and welcomes continuous change in the SCS, has met with some resistance, especially in the implementation of the WITs.

In her excellent analysis of the implementation of WITs in the SCS, Nancy Ng, the Head of the WITs Development Unit in the Civil Service Institute, identified a total of 7 “people problems” and 13 operational problems (Ng, 1990, pp. 198–205). She found that the response to WITs was clearly related to management support and commitment as “ministries with strong management support and encouragement tend to be more active in the formation of WITs” (Ng, 1990, p. 197). On the other hand, if

management support is lacking, the implementation of WITs will encounter “people problems – their attitudes, their behavior, their fears and their expectations, and their excuses – all symptoms of the very human response to change – avoidance, resistance, indifference, fear of inability to cope, fear of failure, fear of commitment, and above all, fear of loss of power and authority, and fear of ‘exposure’ of ‘weaknesses’” (Ng, 1990, p. 198). Indeed, where managers were critical and not supportive, the implementation of WITs was difficult. For example, a manager compelled his supervisor to form a WIT, and when he did so, the manager criticized the exercise as a waste of time. Civil servants who are critical of WITs have referred derisively to the acronym as “Wasting an Individual’s Time.” Indeed, five years after the implementation of PS21, Lim Siong Guan, the then Head of SCS, admitted that “a number of people have told me [that] WITs stands for ‘Wasting Important Time.’ This is because they think WITs meetings are a waste of time.”<sup>15</sup> Another manifestation of inadequate management support for WITs activities is the delay by the managers in reading the WITs reports and implementing the useful recommendations (Ng, 1990, p. 203).

Initially, civil servants were informed that their participation in WITs would be taken into account in their performance evaluation. However, as this was not done, many civil servants were discouraged from participating in WITs as they had to take part in WITs activities in addition to their regular duties.<sup>16</sup> For example, even though the SPF’s WITs teams have performed well at the annual PS21 WITs Convention, there is low participation among some WITs teams in the SPF for these four reasons: (1) some participants felt that they were forced to undertake the projects; (2) most of them had other more important priorities than WITs projects; (3) they could not afford the time outside their jobs to meet and discuss issues; and (4) these teams viewed WITs as an end rather than as a tool to use in their daily work.<sup>17</sup>

The great deal of resistance to WITs among junior police officers is manifested in their negative attitudes toward WITs projects. According to Chia Tong Seng of the SPF’s Public Affairs Department, the main problem of WITs is the “negative attitude” of police officers as they did not believe in WITs. As these officers believed that WITs were “wasting an individual’s time,” they did not acknowledge that WITs would lighten their workloads and refused to acknowledge that WITs could increase job satisfaction.<sup>18</sup>

In its progress report for 2001, the SPF’s Service Development and Inspectorate Department highlighted the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) as one of the departments with both a low WITs project ratio of 0.2 and the lowest SSS suggestion ratio of 2.12 (Mohamed Farouk, 2002,

p. 70). This finding is not surprising for two reasons. First, in view of their heavy workload, CID officers accord higher priority to their operational demands than to WITs or SSS as the latter are viewed as being “peripheral to the assessment of the department” (Mohamed Farouk, 2002, pp. 49–50). The second reason for the CID’s poor performance is that while “there are no serious repercussions for not complying with the requirement of completing two WITs projects per year,” there are also no incentives for participating in WITs or SSS (Mohamed Farouk, 2002, p. 51). Thus, CID officers are not punished for not performing as desired nor are they rewarded for performing as desired. In other words, performance does not matter for CID officers as far as their participation in WITs and SSS is concerned.

The negative attitude toward WITs by junior police officers is not surprising as they are expected to participate in WITs projects in addition to performing their regular duties. As such participation is not rewarded by promotion or other incentives, they consider WITs to be a waste of time. In other words, why should they and other civil servants perform (i.e., participate in WITs) if such desired performance is punishing? (Mager & Pipe, 1997, pp. 43–59). As the SPF is an uniformed organization with a clear hierarchy of authority and emphasis on discipline, it is surprising that there is still resistance to WITs. This implies that in other government departments or statutory boards where discipline is not emphasized so greatly, there will probably be greater resistance to WITs, unless participation in WITs is linked to incentives. For example, WITs have been very successful in the Central Provident Fund Board because of its General Manager’s recognition of the importance of staff participation in WITs projects.

Finally, the Cut Waste Panel (CWP) was formed on 1 September 2003 “to receive suggestions from the public on where the government can cut waste, remove frills and make savings in the delivery of public services.” More specifically, the CWP

will ensure that the suggestions are properly considered and appropriate solutions implemented. When a suggestion is received, the Panel will send it to the relevant agency for study without revealing the identity of the suggestor. The secretariat of the Cut Waste Panel will contact the suggestor for more details on the suggestion if needed. The suggestions and agencies’ responses will be published on the Cut Waste website without identifying the contributors.

The Panel can ask that costs be adjusted, rules removed, programs stopped, and fees and charges reviewed, if it finds them unnecessary. It will help the Government get good value for money in the delivery of services which meet the needs of the public at an acceptable standard. (Ministry of Finance, 2003b)

The CWP was originally chaired by Lim Siong Guan, the then Head of the SCS, and consisted of seven other members including two Members of Parliament, two journalists, a grassroots leader, an accountant, and a consumer advocate. The response to the CWP was good as it received 1,263 suggestions by November 2003 and the various government agencies had agreed with 87 percent or 700 of the 805 suggestions processed (Ministry of Finance, 2003a). The CWP has received a total of 4,866 suggestions from September 2003 to June 2009. Of the 3,513 suggestions (72.2 percent) related to waste, only 519 (14.8 percent) were not suitable for implementation.<sup>19</sup>

Among the many suggestions received by the CWP, I wish to highlight the five suggestions received by the CWP in November 2003, January 2004, and March 2007, concerning WITs as further evidence of the problems encountered in implementing WITs in the SCS.

**Subject:** Wasteful WITs program

**Suggestion:** Currently, all government departments are required to take part in WITs program and competition. Staff [members] are assigned in teams to come up with ideas to produce a comprehensive report which take extensive man hours. ... In this economic situation, I deem this WITs is wasteful of resources, manpower and budget and should be scrapped totally. ... Resources wasted are stationery, man hours, energy and miscellaneous and invisible costs. Please check with any government department to confirm my suggestion. (Prime Minister's Office, 2003c)

**Subject:** WITS Program

**Suggestion:** All government departments are subjecting their staff to take part in [the] WITs program. The percentage of WITs ideas [that] are adopted and cost saving is miniscule when compared to wastage incurred overall. ... It has become ridiculous to an extent that staff is [*sic*] taking part under duress just to produce a submission representing his/her department. Nonsensical and impractical ideas are submitted just for show case. ... This WITs program is a National wastage in manpower, resources and cost to the country and not benefiting the country greatly. (Prime Minister's Office, 2003b)

Joyce Chia, the Assistant Director for Public Affairs and Administration in the Public Service Division (PSD), replied to the above suggestions on 11 and 24 November 2003 with the same “canned” answer below:

The Public Service needs to anticipate change and continually improve to continue to serve Singapore well. The Work Improvement Team Scheme (WITs) Movement is an essential part of this process. It encourages public officers to continuously look for new ways to improve the quality of their work. It provides a means by which public officers can work as a team to solve work-related problems. Through WITs, public officers are given the opportunity to exercise ownership and responsibility for making improvements to their work. They are the ones who really know the problems within their respective work areas and are best suited to find the right solutions.

The topics proposed for WITs must be work-related, and are endorsed by the organization's management before the Work Improvement Teams commence their projects. This ensures that the topics chosen are relevant to the organization's mission and purpose. Participation in WITs is considered part and parcel of every officer's work and is not an extra-curricular activity, nor a waste of time.

We monitor the overall cost savings and benefits from the WITs Movement every year. The total cost savings from the WITs Program for Fiscal Year 2002 was substantial – about S\$165 million dollars. This does not include the intangible value added from WITs projects which enhance service delivery.

We recognize that the WITs Movement can be improved in the way it is implemented. The necessary changes are being made. For instance, the WITs judging criteria have been reviewed to place more emphasis on results, and less on process and strict adherence to WITs tools. We have also introduced a wider variety of, and greater flexibility in the use of, tools for WITs. We also want to balance the quantitative indicators with qualitative indicators. (Prime Minister's Office, 2003b, 2003c)

The third suggestion received by the CWP concerned a review of the reward structure for WITs and the SSS. As WITs was "incentive driven," the suggestor recommended that the CWP should check whether the ministries and statutory boards have spent a great deal of money on WITs and SSS. On 26 November 2003, Joyce Chia replied that as the SSS was introduced for civil servants to improve productivity in the SCS, "good ideas that are accepted are awarded a small token amount" of S\$2 (US\$1.15) and "higher quality suggestions that result in higher savings or value created are awarded more, but not excessively so." As the token award is meant to encourage civil servants to participate in the SSS, "the amount that an officer gets out of SSS will not enrich him" (Prime Minister's Office, 2003a).

The fourth suggestion recommended the removal of WITs as

most civil servants find WITs [to be] a big headache. They tend to keep ideas they have for any work improvement year after year so that they have projects to meet the target. WITs actually slow down any improvement that they may already have in mind. The presentation of WITs is another big waste of resources and time and achieves little purpose. Suggest to remove WITs. (Prime Minister's Office, 2004)

In her reply on 27 January 2004, Joyce Chia reiterated her earlier statement on the aim of WITs, rejected this suggestion and defended the retention of WITs thus:

In the latest survey on WITs, many public officers indicated that they understand and are aware of WITs. A majority also indicated that they enjoy taking part in WITs, and will participate voluntarily. [Specific details on this survey like sample size and who conducted it were not provided.]

The targets that are set for WITs are a means of encouraging and motivating officers to participate and are not quotas that have to be met. If there are government agencies where WITs is practiced wrongly, then it is for these agencies to change and implement WITs in the right spirit and manner. Incorrect implementation of the idea should not mean that the idea itself should be abandoned. (Prime Minister's Office, 2004)

The final suggestion questioned the necessity for making it compulsory for civil servants to participate in WITs when “many staff agree that WITs is irrelevant but unfortunately they have to do it because they have to.” Consequently, they are unmotivated and go through the motion with WITs. Hence, participation in WITs should be voluntary and not mandatory for all civil servants (Prime Minister's Office, 2007). In her reply, Stella Kao, Manager of Communications and International Relations at the PSD, clarified that “it is not compulsory for all public officers to be involved in WITs although officers are strongly encouraged to take part.” She also acknowledged that “WITs is not perfect” and that “some agencies may have been over-enthusiastic” in the implementation of WITs (Prime Minister's Office, 2007).

Unfortunately, Ms Joyce Chia's rejection of the suggestion to remove WITs is a reflection of the government's refusal to acknowledge the widespread resistance to WITs. In contrast to the survey findings reported by Ms Chia above, a 2003 survey of civil servants found that nearly half of them, if given a choice, would not participate in WITs. This finding was similar to that of a 1998 survey of civil servants.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, the continued retention of WITs in spite of its unpopularity contradicts the second objective of welcoming “continuous change for greater efficiency and effectiveness by employing modern management tools and techniques while paying attention to the morale and welfare of public officers.” It seems that WITs is “here to stay” even if it undermines the morale of many civil servants. It is also surprising that the decision for not providing incentives for participation in WITs has not been reversed by the PSD in spite of the tremendous resistance shown by civil servants to such participation.

## **8.9. WHITHER PS21?**

The problems encountered in implementing WITs in the SCS illustrate the difficulties involved in changing the mindset of civil servants, especially in changing their attitudes toward change. In a recent interview, Ngiam Tong Dow, who retired from the SCS as Permanent Secretary (Finance) in 1999, astutely observed that “it takes a certain temperament and mindset to be a

civil servant. The former head of the civil service, Sim Kee Boon, once said that joining the administrative service is like entering a royal priesthood. Not all of us have the temperament to be priests” (Long, 2003, p. 39). In the same interview, he expressed his concern about the SCS thus:

The greatest danger [to the SCS] is we are flying on auto-pilot. What was once a great policy, we just carry on with more of the same, until reality intervenes. . . . We have been flying on auto-pilot for too long. . . . I suspect we have started to believe our own propaganda. There is also a particular brand of Singapore elite arrogance creeping in. Some civil servants behave like they have a mandate from the emperor. We think we are little Lee Kuan Yews. (Long, 2003, p. 39)

Ngiam’s assessment of the SCS should be taken seriously as he was a senior civil servant for 40 years (1959–1999) and became the youngest permanent secretary at the Ministry of Communications at the age of 33. His subsequent postings as permanent secretary were in the Ministries of Finance, Trade and Industry, National Development, and the Prime Minister’s Office. Ngiam’s remarks are instructive as his criticism of the SCS as “flying on auto-pilot” implies that PS21’s second objective of transforming the civil servants’ attitudes toward change has been neglected or not attained so far. The continued retention of the WITS program without any modification in the face of widespread resistance is another good illustration of the SCS “flying on auto-pilot.”

One of the major strengths of public administration in Singapore is its reliance on policy diffusion or the willingness to learn from the experiences of other countries in order to avoid making the same mistakes (Quah, 2003, p. 176). Hence it is surprising that Singapore’s permanent secretaries were not aware of the problems encountered by the Canadian government in implementing Public Service 2000 (PS2000), which was initiated in December 1989, nearly six years before the introduction of PS21 in May 1995. Thus, instead of “reinventing the wheel,” it will be instructive to examine briefly Canada’s ambitious but unsuccessful project, PS2000, to identify relevant lessons for the implementation of PS21 in the SCS.

PS2000 was launched in December 1989 by the then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to “revitalize (‘renew’) the Canadian public service and prepare it for the 21st century” (Caiden, Halley, & Maltais, 1995, p. 86). This was followed in early 1990 by the formation of 10 task forces, which produced over 300 recommendations and 80 policy decisions on various themes (Dwivedi, 1993, pp. 51–54). Caiden, Halley, and Maltais have identified five lessons from Canada’s PS2000, which should be noted by the PS21 Office

and those responsible for implementing PS21 in the SCS, in order to avoid making the same mistakes as the Canadian reformers. The five lessons are:

1. It was recognized too late that political support was only nominal during the design of Public Service 2000 and inadequate during its implementation.
2. *Greater focus and candor were needed throughout PS2000.* Impressive as it was, PS2000 covered too much and involved too many changes at the same time. It promised too much and raised many expectations. It was not clear what its priorities were, thereby creating perhaps unnecessary confusion of where the real effort should be made.
3. *Cultural changes required tools that the reformers did not have or know how to use.* The reformers did not know how to overcome middle management resistance. They did not do enough to change the reward system and provide incentives that might have produced the needed changes.
4. Monitoring was quite inadequate and original expectations could not be modified on the basis of feedback.
5. *The timeframe for implementing PS2000 was underestimated.* Reforms needed time to take effect. Although PS2000 allowed itself 10 years, it was already being judged within two years and found wanting (Caiden et al., 1995, pp. 99–100).

In short, to ensure the effective implementation of PS21 in the SCS, there must be consistent support from the political leadership, greater focus and realistic expectations, the reformers must be given the tools to overcome middle management resistance and to modify the incentive system to produce the needed changes, adequate monitoring, and a longer timeframe for gauging the effectiveness of the reforms. All these five lessons should be heeded by the permanent secretaries and the PSD, especially the third and fourth lessons, in view of their refusal to acknowledge the widespread resistance to WITs in the SCS.

For PS21 to succeed, it must be supported by *everyone* in the SCS and not just the permanent secretaries, who were responsible for its genesis. Interviews with some senior civil servants have revealed that the support for PS21 today varies among the ministries depending on the permanent secretary concerned. For example, Bilahari Kausikan, the second Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was critical of the time, effort and money spent on the elaborate presentations at the annual WITs convention. He also added that “WITs and SSS are widely perceived as a numbers game; an extra-curricular activity and an additional burden, not an

integral part of work.”<sup>21</sup> These civil servants have also expressed the view that support for PS21 was much stronger when Lim Siong Guan, the former Head of the SCS, was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and responsible for implementing PS21. Indeed, it appears that support for PS21 has declined even further under Peter Ho, the current Head of the SCS.

Unlike previous administrative reforms, PS21 does not appear to have the explicit support of the political leaders as it was formulated by the permanent secretaries themselves. While the political leaders have not explicitly objected to PS21, it is also significant that the prime minister or any minister has not made a speech on PS21 during the past 14 years. However, this is not surprising as PS21 is an in-house effort to “reinvent” and prepare the SCS for the 21st century. Thus, while PS21 has improved the quality of service and training in the SCS, which benefits the citizens directly in terms of the provision of services, the impact of the second objective of preparing the civil servants to accept and welcome change on the citizens is indirect and long term and so far, has not been achieved after 14 years.

The successful implementation of PS21 in the SCS also presupposes that there is high morale and little or no resistance to PS21 among civil servants. The aim of the Staff Well-Being Sub-Committee is to formulate policies and programs to enhance the well-being of all civil servants. Indeed, the SCS has initiated many schemes to assist civil servants and their families. For example, the SPF won the Singapore HEALTH Gold Award in 2001 for its efforts in improving the well-being of its officers. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, the “emphasis on the high-flyers or scholars at the expense of the low-flyers and non-scholars” (Quah, 1996b, pp. 63–64) in the SCS has resulted in serious morale problems among the non-scholar civil servants, which PS21 and its emphasis on staff well-being does not address. For example, in the case of the SPF, Mohamed Farouk found that there was “a wide disparity in the treatment of scholars and non-scholars” because scholars are promoted more rapidly than non-scholars (Mohamed Farouk, 2002, p. 39). Lim Siong Guan has stressed that “Staff Well-Being comes first because the individual is the critical member in the whole process of change” (Lim, 1998, p. 126). If this is true, the SCS must rectify its neglect of the problem of low morale of the non-scholar civil servants. Indeed, the PSD must take steps to improve the morale of those disgruntled civil servants and to provide the permanent secretaries and other senior civil servants with guidelines for dealing with resistance to PS21 and WITs.

In sum, what has been the impact of PS21 on the SCS? The first benefit that PS21 has provided to the SCS is the improvement of service standards and the acceptance of the importance of ensuring good customer service among the various government agencies. In other words, PS21’s first

objective of developing an attitude of service excellence in the SCS has been attained as the various PS21 initiatives have improved the quality of service provided by government agencies to their clients.

In addition to improving service quality, PS21 has also enhanced the importance of training in the SCS. A significant consequence of the British colonial legacy is the emphasis on on-the-job training in the SCS and its resistance to conducting off-the-job training programs (Quah, 1996c, p. 52). For example, in 1987, Singapore's per capita expenditure on formal off-the-job training was only S\$100, which was much lower than the corresponding amounts of S\$300 for West Germany, S\$750 for the United States, and S\$3,000 for Japan (Cox, 1987, p. 40). From April 1988, the Ministry of Finance announced that "out of a total of 200 working days each year, at least 10 days will be spent on staff training."<sup>22</sup> With the introduction of PS21 to the SCS in May 1995, the number of days devoted to training has been increased to 12.5 per year or 100 hours for each civil servant.

Finally, the second objective of PS21 cannot be measured accurately because of its intangible nature. Is it realistic to expect civil servants in Singapore to "induce and welcome continuous change" after the introduction of PS21 in May 1995? The answer is no, judging from Ngiam Tong Dow's criticism that the SCS is "flying on auto-pilot" and the widespread resistance shown by many junior civil servants toward WITs. Indeed, it is unrealistic to ask civil servants in Singapore to initiate and accept continuous change as this is akin to asking a leopard to change its spots!

In sum, PS21's contribution to the SCS so far is the improvement of service standards and training. Moreover, these standards would not be eroded even if PS21 were to be abandoned tomorrow because of the acceptance by the SCS and Singaporeans of the importance of providing good customer service and training. Indeed, as I have concluded in my 2005 assessment of the impact of PS21 on the SPF:

PS21 has certainly reinforced the SPF's commitment to service and organizational excellence. However, in my view, if PS21 were to be abandoned tomorrow, no one in the SPF (or the SCS) would shed any tears, as they would not be adversely affected in any significant way. (Quah, 2005, p. 103)

For PS21 to avoid the same fate as Canada's PS2000, the second objective of inducing and welcoming continuous change by civil servants should be abandoned as it is unrealistic and unlikely to be achieved. At the PS21 ExCEL Convention in November 2008, Peter Ho, the Head of the SCS, announced two changes to the implementation of PS21 namely that ministries and statutory boards would be given greater ownership and flexibility in promoting PS21; and progress in PS21 would no longer be

measured in terms of participation in WITs and SSS only (Heng, 2009, p. 8). However, what is indeed surprising is that the WITs program is still retained in the SCS and statutory boards without any modification in spite of the widespread resistance to it by many civil servants today.

## NOTES

1. See <http://app.ps21.gov.sg/newps21/default.asp?id=1>
2. See [http://www.ecitizen.gov.sg/about\\_us.html](http://www.ecitizen.gov.sg/about_us.html)
3. "Towards Citizen-centered Services – e-Government and You," *Challenge*, Vol. 8 (2002):10.
4. "More services with eCitizen portal revamp," *Challenge*, Vol. 8 (2002): 9.
5. See <http://www.ecitizen.gov.sg>
6. "More services with eCitizen portal revamp," 9.
7. "eCitizen portal scores a hit," *Challenge*, Vol. 12, Issue 6 (July 2006): 9.
8. Quoted in Soh (2003, p. 15).
9. "Visit EDUMALL: Teaching Resources Under One Roof," *Challenge*, Vol. 5 (1999): 9.
10. "E-Customer Service @ CPF," *Challenge*, Vol. 5 (1999): 13.
11. See <http://www.tec.gov.sg/about-us.html>
12. Interview with Mrs Cherry Tan, Deputy Director, Productivity and Quality Improvement, Civil Service Institute on February 22, 1991 at the Civil Service Institute in Singapore, quoted in Quah (1994, p. 164).
13. Information provided by the Public Service Division in response to two suggestions to the Cut Waste Panel to end the WITs program. See <http://app.mof.gov.sg/cutwaste/viewsuggestion.asp?id=211> and <http://app.mof.gov.sg/cutwaste/viewsuggestion.asp?id=255>
14. "Training gets Premium Treatment," *Challenge*, Vol. 1 (1996): 1.
15. "Wasting Important Time?" *Challenge*, Vol. 6 (2000): 3.
16. When I asked a senior civil servant why the participation of civil servants in WITs was not considered in evaluating their performance as promised originally, his explanation was that the many suggestions offered by them were not useful.
17. Interview with Chan Yee Fun on 20 May 1999, quoted in Sheila Devi, d/o Panirsilvam and Tan (1999).
18. Interview with Chia Tong Seng on 28 May 1999, quoted in Panirsilvam and Tan (1999).
19. See Table 2: Breakdown of Suggestions (September 2003–June 2009) at <http://www.cutwaste.gov.sg/statistics.html>
20. "Civil Service Ideas Need Revamp: Changes on the way as too much time, effort and money go towards preparing for elaborate annual WITs convention," *Straits Times*, 14 November 2003.
21. Quoted in "Civil Service Ideas Need Revamp".
22. "Civil Servants may soon get at least 10 days' training a year," *Straits Times*, 19 August 1987, p. 32.

# CHAPTER 9

## COMBATING CORRUPTION

Stay clean: dismiss the venal.

– Lee (1979a, p. 38)

Corruption was a serious problem in Singapore during the British colonial period, especially during and after the Japanese Occupation. However, today, Singapore is perceived to be the least corrupt country in Asia and the third least corrupt country among the 180 countries included in Transparency International’s 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). In her book, *Money Makes the World Go Around*, Barbara Garson has observed that her “tentative explanation for Singapore’s prosperity was ‘no corruption’” (Garson, 2001, p. 137). When she asked Jack Bradie of British Petroleum to account for the quality of the civil service in Singapore, his answer was: “What happened in Singapore is Lee Kuan Yew. . . . If they see any corruption they come down on it hard. It’s not a cultural thing; it’s a national decision that comes from the top! I feel lucky to work here” (Garson, 2001, p. 139).

Why is corruption no longer a way of life in contemporary Singapore? How did Singapore succeed in curbing corruption when other Asian countries have failed to do so? What are the secrets of Singapore’s effective anti-corruption strategy? What lessons can other Asian countries learn from Singapore’s war against corruption? The aim of this chapter is to address these questions by analyzing Singapore’s comprehensive anti-corruption strategy which relies on the impartial enforcement of the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB). However, before proceeding further, it is necessary to define corruption and to explain why corruption was rampant during the British colonial period.

### 9.1. WHAT IS CORRUPTION?

Corruption has been defined in different ways by various scholars and organizations according to cultural, legal, or other factors (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008, p. 22). The word

“corruption” is derived from the Latin word *corruptus* and, according to the dictionary, it has six possible meanings: dishonesty for personal gain; depravity; undesirable change; corrupting of something; altered word or phrase; or rotting.<sup>1</sup> However, the most useful typology of contemporary social science definitions of corruption is Arnold J. Heidenheimer’s typology of three major types of definitions (Heidenheimer, 1970, pp. 4–6).

First, most social scientists have formulated public-office-centered definitions which focus on the concept of the public office and describe corruption in terms of the deviations from the norms binding upon its incumbents. Joseph S. Nye’s definition is the best example of a public-office-centered definition. According to Nye, corruption refers to:

behavior which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (family, close private clique), pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence. This includes such behavior as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal or patronage by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private-regarding influence). (Nye, 1967, p. 419)

Second, economists rely on market-centered definitions of corruption which shift the focus from the public office to the market. For example, Jacob van Klaveren has provided this market-centered definition of corruption:

A [corrupt] civil servant . . . regards his public office as a business, the income of which he will, in the extreme case, seek to maximize. The office then becomes a “maximizing unit.” The size of his income [depends] . . . upon the market situation and his talents for finding the point of maximal gain on the public’s demand curve. (van Klaveren, 1970, p. 39)

The third type of definition views corruption as an erosion of the public interest. Carl J. Friedrich has criticized the public-office-centered definition for being too narrow, and the market-centered definition for being too broad. He has recommended the use of the public-interest-centered definition instead. Friedrich has defined corruption thus:

The pattern of corruption can be said to exist whenever a powerholder who is charged with doing certain things i.e., who is a responsible functionary or officeholder, is by monetary or other rewards not legally provided for, induced to take actions which favor whoever provides the rewards and thereby does damage to the public and its interests. (Friedrich, 1966, p. 74)

However, Friedrich’s definition is also not useful as he has not defined explicitly the concept of the public interest.

For this chapter, a public-office-centered definition of corruption is preferred as it is more relevant and useful than the market-centered and

public-interest-centered definitions. The most useful definition of corruption has been provided by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which has defined corruption as “the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit – through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement” (United Nations Development Program, 1999, p. 7). The UNDP’s definition is useful because it identifies the seven major forms of corruption and is also applicable to both the public and private sectors.

## 9.2. CORRUPTION DURING THE BRITISH COLONIAL PERIOD

In his comparative study of the control of bureaucratic corruption in Hong Kong, India, and Indonesia, Leslie Palmier has identified three major causes of corruption such as low salaries, ample opportunities, and weak policing (Palmier, 1985, pp. 271–272). Similarly, corruption was rampant in Singapore, especially among the police during the colonial period because of the low salaries of civil servants, the ample opportunities for corruption, and the ineffective Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB).

Police corruption was prevalent in colonial Singapore even though corruption was made illegal with the enactment of the Penal Code of the Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang, and Singapore in 1871. The 1879 and 1886 Commissions of Inquiry confirmed the existence of extensive police corruption in Penang and Singapore but the British colonial government ignored their findings and did not introduce any anti-corruption law until December 1937, when the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance (POCO) was enacted.

The junior police officers were poorly paid and made ends meet by moonlighting and/or accepting bribes from illegal gambling house owners. Bribery was the most common form of police corruption, followed by direct criminal activities, opportunistic theft, corruption of authority, and protection of illegal activities (Quah, 1979, p. 24). Not surprisingly, the *Straits Times* observed that scandals were unavoidable as the local constables and the European inspectors were “underpaid”.<sup>2</sup>

However, corruption in Singapore during the colonial period was not confined to the police only as government agencies such as the customs, immigration, and internal revenue departments provided more opportunities for corruption than those public agencies with limited contact with the public, and did not issue licenses or permits, or collect fees or taxes. Yoong

Siew Wah, a former CPIB Director, indicated that “the areas in which corruption was widespread were in almost all the licensing activity, food and price control action, the protection rackets connected with the smuggling of gold bars and opium, and gambling” (Yoong, 1972, p. 56).

Corruption was also a factor responsible for the Singapore Improvement Trust’s failure to provide low-cost public housing to solve the housing shortage. As shown in Chapter 4, corruption among some senior expatriate officers and local junior officers was prevalent in the areas of contracts procedure, planning and development control, and the allocation of housing units. In short, corruption in Singapore during the British colonial period was not confined to the police only, but was widespread throughout the civil service.

The problem of corruption deteriorated during the Japanese Occupation (February 1942–August 1945) for two reasons. First, the high inflation rate made it difficult for the civil servants to live on their low wages. Second, the scarcity of food and other basic commodities forced many people to trade in the black market. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Japanese Occupation exacerbated the problem of corruption as “bribery, blackmail, and extortion grew out of the violence and fear” that the Japanese used to rule Singapore (Lee, 2005, p. 205).

Conditions did not improve during the post-war period and corruption was widespread among civil servants because their low salaries, high inflation, and inadequate supervision by their superiors provided them with ample opportunities for corruption with a low probability of being caught (Quah, 1982a, pp. 161–162). Hence it was not surprising that corruption was a way of life for many Singaporeans and the British Military Administration (BMA), which took over after the Japanese surrender in August 1945, was referred to derisively as the “Black Market Administration” (Yoong, 1972, pp. 55–56).

The British colonial government failed to curb corruption because of the ineffectiveness of the two anti-corruption measures such as the POCO and the ACB. The POCO was ineffective because it limited the powers of arrest, search, and investigation of police officers as warrants were required before arrests could be made; and the penalty of imprisonment for two years and/or a fine of S\$10,000 for those found guilty of corruption did not deter corrupt behavior (Quah, 1978b, p. 9).

Similarly, the ACB could not perform its task of corruption control because of the prevalence of police corruption. As the ACB was part of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Singapore Police Force (SPF), it was not surprising that the ACB was ineffective in curbing corruption, especially among policemen. To make matters worse, the ACB

was inadequately staffed with 4 senior officers and 13 junior officers. As the CID's top priority was to solve serious crimes like murder and kidnapping, combating corruption was given lower priority as the ACB had to compete with other branches in the CID for limited manpower and other resources. Within the ACB itself, corruption control was only one of its 16 duties (Quah, 1978b, pp. 14–15). Faced with these constraints, it was not surprising that the ACB failed to tackle the problem of corruption effectively.

The British colonial government only realized the folly of making the ACB responsible for curbing corruption when it discovered that three police detectives and some senior police officers were involved in the robbery of 1,800 pounds of opium worth S\$400,000 (Tan, 1999, p. 59). The opium hijacking scandal exposed the ACB's weaknesses and its inability to curb police corruption. Consequently, the British authorities established the CPIB as an independent agency in October 1952 to replace the ineffective ACB.

### **9.3. THE PAP GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY**

During its campaign for the May 1959 general election, the PAP leaders revealed that the incumbent Minister for Education, Chew Swee Kee, had received more than S\$700,000 from some American donors. Chew resigned from his position and the Legislative Assembly on 4 March. The PAP's commitment to fighting corruption and its exposure of the Chew Swee Kee scandal enabled it to win 43 of the 51 seats with 53.4 percent of the votes cast in the 30 May 1959 general election.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1950s, “bribes and kickbacks were part of the way of life” in Singapore because “people had to grease palms to obtain licenses, permits, immigration papers, public housing and coveted places in schools.” The Lim Yew Hock administration was described as “being corrupt from head to toe” by retired architect, Lee Kip Lin (Yap, Lim, & Leong, 2009, p. 555). Singapore was “a journalist's paradise” and “a Marxist recipe for revolution” as it was afflicted by “riots, strikes, pickets, protests, demonstrations, squalor, poverty, joblessness, corruption, vice, crime, fires, floods, diseases” (Yap et al., 2009, pp. 555–556).

In his memoirs, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, explained why he and his colleagues were determined to keep Singapore free from corruption after assuming office in June 1959:

We were sickened by the greed, corruption and decadence of many Asian leaders. . . . We had a deep sense of mission to establish a clean and effective government. When we took

the oath of office . . . in June 1959, we all wore white shirts and white slacks to symbolize purity and honesty in our personal behavior and our public life. . . . We made sure from the day we took office in June 1959 that every dollar in revenue would be properly accounted for and would reach the beneficiaries at the grass roots as one dollar, without being siphoned off along the way. So from the very beginning we gave special attention to the areas where discretionary powers had been exploited for personal gain and sharpened the instruments that could prevent, detect or deter such practices. (Lee, 2000b, pp. 182–184)

As corruption was a way of life in Singapore in June 1959, the PAP government's mission was to minimize corruption by changing the public perception of corruption as a low risk, high reward activity to a high risk, low reward activity. As the POCO was ineffective and the CPIB did not have sufficient legal powers and inadequately staffed with eight members, the PAP government's top priority was to strengthen both the POCO and the CPIB. In line with this objective, the PAP leaders initiated a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy in June 1960 by enacting the POCA to strengthen the CPIB.

#### 9.4. PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION ACT

The PAP government's determination to curb corruption was explicitly stated by the Minister for Home Affairs, Ong Pang Boon, when he moved for the second reading of the Prevention of Corruption Bill in the Legislative Assembly on 13 February 1960:

The Prevention of Corruption Bill is in keeping with the new Government's determination to stamp out bribery and corruption in the country, especially in the public services. . . . Therefore, this Government is determined to take all possible steps to see that all necessary legislative and administrative measures are taken *to reduce the opportunities of corruption*, to make its detection easier and to deter and punish severely those who are susceptible to it and who engage in it shamelessly.<sup>4</sup>

The POCA, which was enacted on 17 June 1960, has five important features which remove the POCO's weaknesses, enhance the CPIB's legal powers and increase its personnel. First, unlike the POCO with its 12 sections, the POCA's scope is broader with 32 sections.<sup>5</sup> Second, corruption is defined explicitly in section 2 in terms of various forms of "gratification." Third, to increase the POCA's deterrent effect, the penalty for corruption has been increased to imprisonment for five years and/or a fine of S\$10,000 (section 5). Fourth, according to section 13, a person found guilty of accepting an illegal gratification has to pay the amount he had taken as a bribe in addition to any other punishment imposed by a court.

The fifth and most important feature of the POCA is that it gives the CPIB more powers and a new lease of life. Section 15 gives CPIB officers powers of arrest and search of arrested persons. Section 18 empowers the Public Prosecutor to authorize the CPIB's Director and his senior officers to investigate "any bank account, share account or purchase account" of any person suspected of having committed an offense against the POCA. Section 20 enables the CPIB officers to inspect a civil servant's banker's book and those of his wife, child or agent, if necessary. Section 21 empowers the Public Prosecutor to obtain information on an individual's property, income tax, and bank accounts from the relevant government departments and banks. Police officers and CPIB officers are given powers of search and seizure by section 22 which enables them to enter any suspected place and search, seize and detain incriminating documents under a warrant issued by a magistrate or the CPIB's Director.

Section 24 is perhaps the most important asset for the CPIB in its investigation of corruption offenses as "the fact that an accused person is in possession, for which he cannot satisfactorily account, of pecuniary resources or property disproportionate to his known sources of income" is evidence that he or she had obtained these pecuniary resources or property "corruptly as an inducement or reward." Section 27 states that those individuals required by the CPIB's Director or officers to provide information are legally bound to do so. Section 32 enables the CPIB to deal with offenders more swiftly and effectively as it specifies that all offenses under the POCA are seizable offenses. Section 35 also empowers the court to require those charged with an offense under the POCA to appear as witnesses for the prosecution. Finally, the CPIB is also assisted by section 36, which protects informers by keeping their identities confidential (Quah, 1978b, pp. 11–13). Thus, the POCA has given the CPIB a new lease of life by entrusting it with additional powers for performing its duties.

To ensure the POCA's continued effectiveness, the PAP government has introduced whenever necessary, amendments (in 1963, 1966, and 1981) or new legislation (in 1989) to deal with unanticipated problems or to plug legal loopholes. For example, in 1966, the POCA was amended so that a person could be found guilty of corruption without actually receiving the bribe as long as he had shown the intention of doing so (section 9). The POCA was also amended in 1966 so that, according to section 37, Singaporeans working for their government in embassies and other government agencies abroad would be prosecuted for corrupt offenses committed outside Singapore and would be dealt with as if such offenses had occurred within Singapore.

In 1981, the POCA was amended a third time to increase its deterrent effect by requiring those convicted of corruption to repay all the money received in addition to facing the usual court sentence (section 13). Offenders who could not make full restitution were given heavier court sentences.<sup>6</sup> Eight years later, the fine for corrupt offenses was further increased by ten times from S\$10,000 to S\$100,000 (US\$70,681 in 2008) to enhance the POCA's deterrent effect. Sections 11 and 12 stipulate that Members of Parliament and members of public bodies found guilty of corrupt offenses would be fined S\$100,000 and imprisoned for a term of seven years.

On 2 December 1986, the Minister for National Development, Teh Cheang Wan, was interrogated for 16 hours by two senior CPIB officers because he was accused of accepting two bribes amounting to S\$1 million in 1981 and 1982 from two developers (Parliament of Singapore, 1987, pp. 1, 36). Teh committed suicide 12 days later and his suicide led to a commission of inquiry and the enactment of the Corruption (Confiscation of Benefits) Act 1989 on 3 March 1989.<sup>7</sup> This new Act enabled the court to issue a confiscation order against a deceased defendant.

## **9.5. THE CORRUPT PRACTICES INVESTIGATION BUREAU**

The British colonial government's lack of political will in curbing corruption in Singapore is reflected in the delay in introducing anti-corruption measures and the two policy mistakes it made after these measures were initiated. While corruption was made illegal in 1871, the British authorities took 66 years to enact the POCO in December 1937. In spite of the evidence provided by the 1879 and 1886 commissions of inquiry that police corruption was rampant in Singapore, the British colonial government made the first policy mistake of assigning the task of corruption control to the ACB, which was also not given adequate resources for that task. As mentioned earlier, the discovery of police involvement in the October 1951 opium hijacking scandal forced the British authorities to establish the CPIB as an agency outside the SPF a year later. Having rectified its first mistake, the British colonial government made the second policy mistake of not providing the CPIB with adequate resources or legal powers as the CPIB's original staff of five members was much lower than the ACB's 17 personnel.

Unlike the British colonial government, the PAP government is committed to curbing corruption and its political will is reflected in the

enactment of the POCA in June 1960, which strengthened the CPIB and gave it a new lease of life. The CPIB performs these three functions:

1. Receiving and investigating complaints concerning corruption in the public and private sectors.
2. Investigating malpractices and misconduct by public officers.
3. Examining the practices and procedures in the public service to minimize opportunities for corrupt practices (CPIB, 1990, p. 2).

The Corrupt Practices Investigation Program is described in the Republic of Singapore Budget as the administration of the CPIB and “the investigation of corruption and malpractices, the review of administrative weaknesses in the public sector that provides avenues for corruption and the screening of officers for appointment in the public sector” (Republic of Singapore, 1994b, p. 638). Thus, in relation to its preventive function, the CPIB is also responsible for screening candidates selected for positions in the Singapore Civil Service and statutory boards to ensure that only those candidates without any taint of corruption or misconduct are actually appointed.

The CPIB has grown by nearly 19 times from a small staff of five officers in 1952 to its current strength of 93 officers in 2008 as indicated in [Table 9.1](#). Even though the CPIB has increased its manpower during 1952–2008, it is still a relatively small agency on two counts: first, in terms of the size of the SCS in 2008 (67,814), the CPIB’s personnel constitutes only 0.14 percent;

**Table 9.1.** Growth of CPIB’s Personnel (1952–2008).

Year	Number of Personnel
1952	5
1959	8
1963	33
1965	36
1970	50
1976	61
1980	69
1998	79
2000	84
2005	82
2007	89
2008	93

Sources: Compiled from [Quah \(1978b, p. 17, Table 2\)](#) and Republic of Singapore (1978–2009, various pages).

and second, compared to Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) staff of 1,263 personnel in 2008, the ICAC is about 14 times larger than the CPIB (Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 52, Table 4.7; Independent Commission Against Corruption, 2009, p. 28). In spite of its workload, the CPIB does not need as much staff as the ICAC because its location within the Prime Minister's Office and its legal powers have enabled the CPIB to obtain the necessary cooperation from both public and private organizations (Quah, 1995a, p. 397).

The CPIB was originally divided into three branches: the Investigation Branch, the Data Management and Support Branch, and the Administration Branch (CPIB, 1990, pp. 3–4). It currently has two divisions: the Operations Division and the Administration and Specialist Support Division. The Operations Division is sub-divided into the Operations Branch and the Operations Support Branch, which includes the Intelligence Unit. The Operations Branch consists of the Special Investigation Team, which handles major and complex cases, and three other units. The Administration and Specialist Support Division has four units: Administration Unit, Prevention and Review unit, Computer Information System Unit, and the Plans and Projects Unit (CPIB, 2004, pp. 3–4). The CPIB upgraded the Computer Information System Unit in July 2004 with the formation of the Computer Forensic Unit to improve its investigative and evidence gathering capabilities.<sup>8</sup>

The PAP government has allocated sufficient resources to the CPIB as manifested in the growth of its budget from 1978 to 2008. Table 9.2 shows that the CPIB's budget has progressively grown by four times to S\$4,147,230 in 1987, by almost 10 times to S\$10,225,463 in 1997, by 14 times to S\$14,619,718 in 2007, and by nearly 17 times to S\$17,136,700 in 2008.

The CPIB has adopted a "total approach to enforcement" by dealing with both "big and small cases" of corruption in both the public and private sectors, "both giver and receiver of bribes" and "other crimes uncovered in

**Table 9.2.** Budget of the CPIB (1978–2008).

Year	Budget (S\$)	% Increase
1978	\$1,024,370	100
1987	\$4,147,230	405
1997	\$10,225,463	998
2007	\$14,619,718	1,427
2008	\$17,136,700	1,673

Source: Republic of Singapore (1978–2009, various pages).

the course of [the] corruption investigation.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to its emphasis on investigation and enforcement, the CPIB employs a proactive approach to its activities on corruption prevention and education. As part of its preventive function, the CPIB reviews the procedures and practices in those government agencies, where corruption has occurred and makes recommendations to remove the “loopholes and vulnerabilities.” The CPIB uses this review process to “identify potential problem areas and loopholes” in order to minimize the opportunities for corruption (Soh, 2008b, p. 8).

The CPIB’s extensive outreach program is implemented by its Public Education Group, which conducts prevention and education talks for pre-university students, principals, and teachers, newly appointed civil servants, law enforcement agencies like the police and immigration, and the management and staff of major organizations in key industries.<sup>10</sup> Needless to say, the CPIB’s success has attracted worldwide attention and it has received many visitors from other countries. The CPIB also arranges attachments for the staff of anti-corruption agencies from 21 countries during 2006–2008 (Soh, 2008b, p. 5). It conducts anti-corruption training courses for civil servants at various levels in Singapore with the Civil Service College. Table 9.3 shows that the number of persons attending the CPIB’s prevention and education talks has increased from 2,500 in 2005 to 7,000 in 2007. Similarly, the number of foreign visitors to the CPIB has doubled from 1,000 to 2,000 during 2005–2007.

The CPIB’s activities are reviewed by two committees: the Anti-Corruption Advisory Committee (ACAC) and the Anti-Corruption Review Committee (ACRC). The ACAC was formed in 1973 on the Prime Minister’s advice to enhance the CPIB’s efforts to curb corruption in the SCS. The ACAC consists of the Head of the SCS and all the permanent secretaries. The ACAC was dissolved in 1975 and revived in 1996 on the

**Table 9.3.** Number of Persons Attending the CPIB’s Prevention and Education Activities (2005–2007).

Activity	2005	2006	2007
Prevention and education talks	2,500	4,500	7,000
Visits by foreign delegates	1,000	1,500	2,000
Visits by local organizations	20	200	350
Student visits	150	200	400
Total	3,670	6,400	9,750

Source: Information provided by the CPIB on 3 July 2008.

ACRC's recommendation to review the CPIB's investigative and preventive measures. The ACRC was established in 1996 to review Singapore's anti-corruption measures. The ACRC is made up of senior civil servants and is chaired by the Head of the SCS (Tan, 1999, p. 61).

The CPIB was originally under the Attorney-General's purview when it was formed in October 1952. After being transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1959, the CPIB was under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) during 1963–1965, and the Attorney-General from 1965 to 1968. Since 1969, the CPIB has been under the PMO's jurisdiction (CPIB, 2003a, p. 16.109). Even though the CPIB is under the PMO's purview, it has investigated all allegations of corruption against political leaders and senior civil servants in Singapore as the PAP government is committed to curbing corruption.

The four PAP leaders who were investigated for corruption by the CPIB were: Tan Kia Gan, the Minister for National Development, in 1966 for assisting his friend in the sale of Boeing aircraft to Malaysian Airways; Wee Toon Boon, Minister of State, in 1975 for accepting bribes from a property developer; Phey Yew Kok, a Member of Parliament and trade union leader in 1979 for criminal breach of trust; and Teh Cheang Wan, Minister for National Development, in 1986 for accepting bribes from two property developers. Tan was stripped of all his public appointments as the witnesses did not give evidence against him. Wee was found guilty and sentenced to four and a half years of imprisonment. Phey jumped bail and fled abroad and remains a fugitive. Teh committed suicide before he could be charged in court (CPIB, 2003a, pp. 6.45–6.47).

Similarly, the CPIB has initiated investigations against senior civil servants who were accused of corruption. The Director of the Commercial Affairs Department, Glenn Knight, was investigated in March 1991 and sentenced to three months' jail in October 1991 for attempted cheating and giving false information to obtain a government car loan. In 1993, the Chief Executive Officer of the Trade Development Board, Yeo Seng Teck, was investigated for cheating offenses and charged for 22 counts of forgery, cheating, and using forged invoices involving the purchases of Chinese antiques worth S\$2 million. He was found guilty and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Two years later, Choy Hon Tim, the Deputy Chief Executive (Operations) of the Public Utilities Board, was investigated for receiving kickbacks from some contractors. He was convicted for receiving bribes amounting to S\$13.85 million and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment (CPIB, 2003a, pp. 6.48–6.49).

The Constitution of the Republic of Singapore was amended in 1991 to establish the elected president whose role is to protect the official foreign

reserves, to maintain the integrity of the SCS and statutory boards, and to prevent the government from abusing its powers to curb subversion, religious extremism and corruption (Quah, 1991d, pp. 396–398). To prevent the government from abusing its power to curb corruption, article 22 empowers the CPIB’s Director to investigate ministers and senior civil servants without the prime minister’s permission if he obtains the elected president’s consent. This means that the CPIB’s Director can investigate the prime minister for corruption if he has the elected president’s permission to do so (CPIB, 2003a, p. 2.16). Thus, the elected president was introduced to check the prime minister’s power in Singapore’s one-party dominant parliament as, “without certain safeguards, it would be quite easy for a corrupt prime minister to squander the country’s hard-earned official foreign reserves, which have increased to S\$234,545.6 million (US\$155,627.1 million) in December 2007” (Quah, 2008c, p. 29). The official foreign reserves have further increased to S\$250,346 million (US\$176,947.9 million) in December 2008 (Department of Statistics, 2009, p. 188, Table 16.4).

## 9.6. EVALUATION OF SINGAPORE’S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY

Singapore’s anti-corruption strategy is evaluated at two levels. First, Singapore’s anti-corruption strategy can be evaluated at the national level by referring to Singapore’s ranking and scores on these four indicators: Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) from 1995 to 2009; Hong Kong’s Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) annual surveys of corruption from 1995 to 2009; World Bank’s governance indicator on the control of corruption from 1996 to 2008; and the *Global Competitiveness Report’s* indicator on the Public Trust in Politicians’ Honesty from 1999–2003/2004 and 2007/2008.

The data in Table 9.4 confirm Singapore’s pre-eminent position as the least corrupt country in Asia according to all three indicators. Singapore was ranked third among 41 countries with a score of 9.26 in the 1995 CPI. In 2009, Singapore’s rank is third among the 180 countries included in the CPI and its score is 9.2. Similarly, Singapore has retained its rank as the least corrupt Asian country on PERC’s annual survey of corruption from 1995–2009. The World Bank’s data on the control of corruption for 1996, 1998, 2000 and from 2002–2008 also confirm that Singapore has the highest percentile rank among all the Asian countries included in the survey.

**Table 9.4.** Singapore's Performance on CPI, PERC, and Control of Corruption (1995–2009).

Year	CPI Rank and Score	PERC Rank and Score	Control of Corruption Percentile Rank
1995	3rd (9.26)	1st (1.20)	NA
1996	7th (8.80)	1st (1.09)	97.6
1997	9th (8.66)	1st (1.05)	NA
1998	7th (9.1)	1st (1.43)	100.0
1999	7th (9.1)	1st (1.55)	NA
2000	6th (9.1)	1st (0.71)	99.5
2001	4th (9.2)	1st (0.83)	NA
2002	5th (9.3)	1st (0.90)	99.5
2003	5th (9.4)	1st (0.38)	99.0
2004	5th (9.3)	1st (0.50)	99.5
2005	5th (9.4)	1st (0.65)	99.0
2006	5th (9.3)	1st (1.30)	98.1
2007	4th (9.3)	1st (1.20)	96.1
2008	4th (9.2)	1st (1.13)	99.5
2009	3rd (9.2)	1st (1.07)	NA

*Note:* The CPI score ranges from 0 (most corrupt) to 10 (least corrupt); and the PERC score ranges from 0 (least corrupt) to 10 (most corrupt). The Control of Corruption data are not available for 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001 as the survey was conducted every two years from 1996 to 2002. However, from 2003, the survey was conducted annually.

*Sources:* Compiled from <http://www.transparency.org>, [http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/sc\\_chart.asp](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/sc_chart.asp), <http://www.cpi.gov.sg>, <http://www.sedb.com>, and <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/334265/1.html>.

To assess the competitiveness of institutions, the *Global Competitiveness Report* (GCR) has relied on eight indicators, including the public's trust in politicians' honesty. For the 1999 GCR, Singapore was ranked first among 59 countries with a score of 6.36 on scale of 1–7 with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 indicating strong agreement with this statement: "Public trust in the financial honesty of politicians is very high" (Schwab, Porter, Sachs, Warner, & Levinson, 1999, p. 327, Table 8.19). Table 9.5 shows that Singapore has retained its first ranking among the 11 Asian countries for 2000 to 2003–2004 and 2007–2008 with a score between 6.4 and 6.5.

As the CPIB is the lead anti-corruption agency in Singapore, the effectiveness of Singapore's anti-corruption strategy can also be assessed at the agency level by using three sets of indicators to evaluate the CPIB's effectiveness in enforcing the POCA, beginning with its focus on organizational excellence.

**Table 9.5.** Public Trust in Politicians' Honesty in Selected Asian Countries (1999–2003/2004 and 2007/2008)<sup>a</sup>.

Country	1999	2000	2001–2002	2003–2004	2007–2008
Singapore	1 (6.36)	1 (6.5)	1 (6.4)	1 (6.5)	1 (6.4)
Hong Kong <sup>b</sup>	11 (4.92)	7 (5.5)	10 (4.2)	13 (4.4)	11 (5.2)
Vietnam	20 (3.87)	24 (3.4)	15 (3.8)	25 (3.5)	52 (2.9)
China	26 (3.50)	32 (3.0)	18 (3.8)	20 (3.8)	45 (3.1)
Taiwan	27 (3.46)	35 (2.9)	39 (3.2)	24 (3.6)	57 (2.8)
Malaysia	30 (2.95)	29 (3.1)	38 (2.8)	19 (3.8)	18 (4.6)
Japan	31 (2.89)	34 (2.9)	40 (2.6)	51 (2.3)	33 (3.4)
Indonesia	41 (2.26)	40 (2.5)	53 (2.0)	38 (3.1)	63 (2.6)
Thailand	45 (2.22)	47 (2.1)	37 (2.8)	40 (2.9)	60 (2.7)
South Korea	46 (2.10)	44 (2.3)	51 (2.1)	42 (2.9)	22 (4.0)
Philippines	49 (2.02)	51 (2.0)	52 (2.1)	94 (1.4)	119 (1.7)
India	53 (1.85)	53 (1.9)	49 (2.1)	82 (1.7)	83 (2.2)
Sample size	59	59	75 <sup>c</sup>	102 <sup>c</sup>	131

<sup>a</sup>The score is indicated within brackets and ranges from 1 = very low to 7 = very high.

<sup>b</sup>Hong Kong SAR is part of China.

<sup>c</sup>Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were included in the GCR in 2001–2002 and 2003–2004, and Pakistan was only included in the GCR in 2003–2004. However, these three countries are excluded from this table as they were not included in the GCR in 1999 and 2000.

*Sources:* Compiled from Schwab et al. (1999, p. 327, Table 8.19), Porter et al. (2000, p. 253, Table 4.16), Schwab, Porter, Sachs, Cornelius, and McArthur (2002, p. 408, Table 7.07), Sala-i-Martin (2004, p. 499, Table 7.07), and Schwab and Porter (2007, p. 379, Table 1.04).

The CPIB's commitment to organizational excellence is reflected in the many awards it has won. The CPIB is the first agency in Singapore other than a ministry to be awarded the Public Service Award for Organizational Excellence in 2000 for attaining these three awards: ISO 9000 (awarded in December 1997 and renewed in 2000); Singapore Quality Class (awarded in July 1998 and renewed in 2000); and People Developer (awarded in March 1999 and renewed in 2002) (CPIB, 2003a, p. 15.100). In 2003, the CPIB became the first government agency in Singapore to receive the People Excellence Award.<sup>11</sup> In 2004, the CPIB attained the Singapore Service Class and the Singapore Innovation Class. Finally, the CPIB was awarded the Distinguished Public Service Award for Organizational Excellence in 2005 as it had attained six of the eight organizational excellence awards in Singapore during 1995–2005.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, the CPIB's effectiveness as an anti-corruption agency can be assessed according to its seven performance indicators. Table 9.6 shows that the CPIB has (1) exceeded its target of completing 62 percent of its

**Table 9.6.** CPIB's Performance Indicators.

Performance Indicator	Definition	Performance Data
1. Cycle time	Time taken to complete an investigation	Exceeded target of completing 62% of its investigations within 30 days by an average of 31.3% during 1999–2002
2. Completion rate	Percentage of cases completed in a year	Exceeded target of completing 90% of cases in a year during 1999–2002
3. Prosecution rate	Percentage of cases resulting in prosecution	Increased from 47% in 2000 to 60% in 2002
4. Conviction rate	Percentage of cases convicted in court	Increased from 97% in 2000 to 99% in 2002
5. Attendance to visitors	Target is to attend to 80% of its visitors within five minutes	Exceeded target by 1% to 6% from 1997 to 2000
6. Proportion of reports investigated	Percentage of reports investigated	Average of 60% during 1998–2002
7. Number of persons charged and disciplined	Number of persons charged and the number of public officers disciplined	680 persons were charged and 293 public officers were disciplined during 2000–2002

*Source:* CPIB (2003a, pp. 3.24, 3.25, 14.96, 5.36).

investigations within 30 days by an average of 31.3 percent from 1999 to 2002; (2) exceeded its target of completing 90 percent of cases in a year from 1999 to 2002; (3) increased its prosecution rate from 47 percent to 60 percent from 2000 to 2002; (4) investigated an average of 60 percent of the reports received from 1998 to 2002; and (5) increased its conviction rate from 97 percent to 99 percent from 2000 to 2002.

The third indicator of the CPIB's effectiveness is also reflected in its favorable public perception in the October 2002 survey of 1,000 Singaporeans. Table 9.7 shows that in terms of corruption control in Singapore, 13 percent of the respondents gave an excellent grade, 42 percent a very good grade, 39 percent a good grade, and only 7 percent a fair grade. Similarly, 71 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the CPIB has done well in solving corruption offenses. Furthermore, 61 percent of them trusted the CPIB to keep Singapore corruption free, and 56 percent of them agreed or strongly agreed that the CPIB was world class in curbing corruption. The respondents' positive view of the CPIB's professionalism is manifested in these survey findings: nearly 70 percent of the respondents believed that the CPIB was impartial in its investigations; 65 percent of them

**Table 9.7.** Public Perceptions of CPIB's Performance in 2002.

Survey Item	Survey Findings
1. How would you rate corruption control in Singapore?	Excellent = 13%; Very Good = 42%; Good = 39%; Fair = 7%; Poor = 0
2. CPIB has done well in solving corruption offenses	Strongly agree = 20%; Agree = 51%; Not sure = 28%; Disagree = 2%; Strongly disagree = 0
3. CPIB can be trusted to keep Singapore corruption-free	Strongly agree = 24%; Agree = 37%; Not sure = 32%; Disagree = 6%; Strongly disagree = 1%
4. CPIB is world-class in fighting corruption	Strongly agree = 17%; Agree = 39%; Not sure = 36%; Disagree = 7%; Strongly disagree = 1%
5. Do you think CPIB is impartial/fair in its investigations?	Yes = 69.9%; No = 5.6%; Don't know/no opinion = 24.5%
6. Do you think CPIB has abused its investigation powers?	No = 65%; Yes = 7.2%; Don't know/no opinion = 27.8%
7. Do you think CPIB will keep corruption reports it receives confidential?	Yes = 66%; No = 10%; Don't know/no opinion = 24%

Source: CPIB (2003a, pp. 5.40 and 14.97).

said that the CPIB had not abused its investigation powers; and 66 percent of them thought that the CPIB would keep the corruption reports received as confidential.

The 2005 public perception survey commissioned by the CPIB has also confirmed the public's favorable view of the CPIB's performance. In terms of the perceived level of corruption control, 89 percent of the respondents observed that corruption was very much under control in Singapore, and 48 percent of them agreed that the level of corruption control had improved during the past three years. Furthermore, 86 percent of the respondents felt that corruption control in Singapore was better than other countries. According to the respondents, the low level of corruption in Singapore could be attributed to the political will to keep corruption under control, the heavy punishment for corruption offenses, and the effectiveness of the anti-corruption law (CPIB, 2006, pp. 1–2).

Finally, the 2005 survey also revealed the following public perceptions of the CPIB:

1. *Knowledge on the CPIB and its role:* 80 percent of the respondents knew there was a government department responsible for investigating corruption

- offenses and 57 percent could identify the CPIB. Among the latter, 67 percent said that the CPIB was doing a good job and only 2 percent thought otherwise. Furthermore, 72 percent of the respondents trusted the CPIB to be impartial in handling investigations, and 9 percent did not share this view. 55 percent of the respondents agreed that the CPIB did not abuse its investigation powers while 9 percent of them felt that it did.
2. *Reporting to the CPIB on corruption*: 50 percent of the respondents said that they would report a case of corruption, 34 percent indicated that their response depended on the situation, 12 percent would not do so, and only 4 percent had no opinion.
  3. *Confidentiality of CPIB's reports*: 72 percent of the respondents believed that the CPIB would keep its reports confidential, while the remaining 28 percent were not sure or had no opinion.
  4. *CPIB's service targets*: 81 percent of the respondents felt that the CPIB's service targets were "just right" while 6 percent of them said that these targets were lenient (CPIB, 2006, pp. 2–3).

In sum, the CPIB is an effective anti-corruption agency according to its commitment to organizational excellence, its various performance indicators, and the favorable public perceptions of its performance. Singapore's success in minimizing corruption can be attributed to the PAP government's political will as seen in the provision of adequate legal powers, budget, and personnel to the CPIB to enable it to implement the POCA impartially and effectively. As shown in [Box 9.1](#), former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has emphasized the important contribution of public cooperation and public opinion to Singapore's effective anti-corruption strategy.

While the CPIB is responsible to a large extent for Singapore's effective anti-corruption strategy, it should also be acknowledged that the CPIB's efforts in curbing corruption have been assisted by the PAP government's reliance on meritocracy, paying competitive salaries to political leaders and senior bureaucrats, cutting red tape, and using e-government to minimize opportunities for corruption. As discussed in Chapter 5, meritocracy was introduced by the British colonial government in Singapore with the formation of the Public Service Commission (PSC) in January 1951. The PAP government continues to rely on the PSC to recruit and promote civil servants on the basis of merit. To attract the "best and brightest" citizens into the civil service, the PSC awards scholarships to the best students in each cohort and requires them to serve for a number of years after their graduation.

The analysis in Chapter 6 has shown that the PAP government did not increase the salaries of the civil servants during 1959–1971 even though this

**Box 9.1. Why Singapore is Effective in Curbing Corruption**

In January 1987, the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew identified the five factors responsible for Singapore's effective anti-corruption strategy in his statement to Parliament during the Teh Cheang Wan Commission of Inquiry:

The effectiveness of our system to check and punish corruption rests, first, on the law against corruption contained in the Prevention of Corruption Act; second, on a vigilant public ready to give information on all suspected corruption; and third, on a CPIB which is scrupulous, thorough, and fearless in its investigations. For this to be so, the CPIB has to receive the full backing of the Prime Minister, under whose portfolio it comes. But the strongest deterrent is in a public opinion which censures and condemns corrupt persons; in other words, in attitudes which make corruption so unacceptable that the stigma of corruption cannot be washed away by serving a prison sentence.

*Source:* Quoted in Parliament of Singapore (1987, p. 2).

was recommended by a 1968 report on public sector salaries. However, the rapid growth of Singapore's economy during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in higher salaries and huge bonuses in the private sector and led to a brain drain of talented civil servants. Consequently, the PAP government was compelled to increase the salaries of civil servants and political leaders periodically from 1972 to January 1994. Their salaries were benchmarked with the salaries of the top four earners in six private sector professions from January 1995. This policy of paying competitive salaries has curbed the brain drain of ministers and permanent secretaries (but not Division I civil servants) to the private sector and reduced the temptation for senior civil servants and political leaders to be corrupt.

As red tape and bureaucratic delay are major causes of corruption, the PAP government established the Service Improvement Unit in April 1991 to improve service in the public sector in Singapore by improving the quality of service through the elimination of unnecessary regulations. In May 1995, Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21) was initiated to improve the quality of service and prepare the civil service to welcome and accept change. As part of PS21, the Cut Waste Panel was formed in September 2003 to get public feedback on how the government can reduce waste and increase savings in the delivery of public services.

E-government has also been employed by the PAP government to enhance transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption through the simplification of the procedures for obtaining business licenses. In 2004, the On-line Applications System for Integrated Services (OASIS) was introduced to enable the public to “apply, renew or terminate 85 different types of licenses” online. Similarly, the on-line procurement portal known as GeBiz was launched to allow government procurement to be done through the internet, thereby reducing opportunities for corruption and enhancing efficiency and transparency in procurement (Soh, 2008b, p. 7). GeBiz provides a great deal of procurement information and documentation including:

guidelines for registration as a government supplier, tender notices with relevant information about the tender, details of tenders which have been submitted, names of successful tenderers together with the nature and quantity of the goods and services to be provided and where appropriate the value of the contract awarded. (Jones, 2002a, p. 37)

Singapore’s effectiveness in cutting red tape has been recognized by the World Bank’s *Doing Business Survey*, which has ranked Singapore as the best economy in terms of the ease of doing business from 2007 to 2009. In 2007, Singapore was ranked first on the ease of doing business among 175 economies. Singapore retained its top position among 178 economies in the 2008 survey and 181 economies in the 2009 survey.<sup>13</sup>

## 9.7. LESSONS FOR OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES

Corruption is a serious problem in many Asian countries judging from their rankings and scores on Transparency International’s CPI from 1995 to 2009. What lessons can those Asian countries where corruption is rampant learn from Singapore’s experience in curbing corruption? However, before answering this question, the significant contextual differences between Singapore and the other Asian countries must be recognized. Singapore’s favorable policy context, which was described in Chapter 2, has assisted the CPIB in enforcing the POCA impartially. In contrast, many Asian countries have less favorable policy contexts which have adversely affected the implementation of their anti-corruption strategies.

The contextual differences between Singapore and other Asian countries mean that Singapore’s effective anti-corruption strategy is not transferable *in toto* to these countries. Nevertheless, these countries can emulate Singapore by adapting those aspects of its anti-corruption strategy that

are suitable for their needs if their political leaders, civil servants, and the population are prepared to make the required changes (Quah, 1998, p. 121).

Assuming that the political leaders in Asian countries find it desirable to adopt selected aspects of Singapore's anti-corruption strategy, another important consideration is whether the proposed anti-corruption reforms are feasible. Richard Rose notes that the implementation of these reforms requires the commitment of the required resources by the political leaders (Rose, 2005, p. 103). Thus, the first lesson which other Asian countries can learn from Singapore's experience in curbing corruption is the critical importance of political will.

#### *9.7.1. Lesson 1: Political Will is Required for Success*

First, Singapore's experience shows that the political leaders in other Asian countries must be sincerely committed to the eradication of corruption by demonstrating exemplary conduct, adopting a modest life-style, and avoiding being corrupt themselves. Thus, anyone found guilty of corruption must be punished, regardless of his or her position or status in society. If the "big fish" (rich and famous persons) are immune from prosecution for corruption, and the anti-corruption agency focuses its energies on catching only "small fish" (ordinary people), the anti-corruption strategy lacks credibility and is doomed to failure.

In addition to the impartial enforcement of the anti-corruption laws by the anti-corruption agency, there are two other indicators of a government's political will in curbing corruption. First, there must be comprehensive anti-corruption legislation to prevent loopholes and periodic review of such legislation to introduce amendments whenever necessary. A glaring example of lack of political will in fighting corruption is the 15-year delay in passing the draft Anti-Corruption Law in Cambodia. This bill, which was originally introduced in 1994, was not enacted by the government's official deadline of June 2006 (MacLean, 2006, p. 17; Ford & Seng, 2007, p. 186). On 16 May 2006, a petition with more than one million signatures and thumbprints was presented to the Cambodian National Assembly requesting its members to urgently enact an anti-corruption law. However, this plea fell on deaf ears as Lao Mong Hay lamented that "deadlines set for the enactment of that law have repeatedly passed and the final draft has not yet seen the light of day" (Lao, 2008). In October 2006, Prime Minister Hun Sen justified the delay in terms of his government's intention that the law should "be as close to perfect as possible, with workable implementation guidelines" drafted on

**Table 9.8.** Comparative Analysis of the Personnel and Budgets of Eight Anti-Corruption Agencies in Asian Countries in 2005.

Anti-Corruption Agency	Personnel	Budget	Population	Staff-Population Ratio	Per Capita Expenditure
Macao CCAC	112	US\$10.6 m	488,100	1:4,358	US\$21.72
Hong Kong ICAC	1,194	US\$85 m	7.0 m	1:5,863	US\$12.14
Singapore CPIB	81	US\$7.7 m	4.3 m	1:53,086	US\$1.79
South Korea KICAC	205	US\$17.8 m	47.8 m	1:233,171	US\$0.37
Thailand NCCC	924	US\$22.8 m	64.2 m	1:69,481	US\$0.36
India CBI	4,711	US\$30.3 m	1,081.2 m	1:229,505	US\$0.28
Philippines Ombudsman	957	US\$12 m	81.4 m	1:85,057	US\$0.15
Indonesia CEC	305	US\$18 m	222.6 m	1:729,836	US\$0.08

*Sources:* Commission Against Corruption (2006, pp. 119, 123), Independent Commission Against Corruption (2006, p. 28), Republic of Singapore (2007, pp. 371–372), Central Bureau of Investigation (2006, pp. 38, 44), Korea Independent Commission Against Commission (2006, p. 6), Office of the Ombudsman (2006, pp. 73, 91), Office of the National Counter Corruption Commission (2006, pp. 85, 87), and Davidsen, Juwono, and Timberman (2006, p. 52).

the basis of new penal codes.<sup>14</sup> This delay in enacting the Anti-Corruption Law after 15 years clearly reflects the Cambodian government's lack of political will in curbing corruption (Quah, 2007b, p. 7). Hence, it is not surprising that corruption is rampant in Cambodia which has been ranked 158th among the 180 countries on Transparency International's 2009 CPI with a score of 2.0 out of a maximum score of 10.<sup>15</sup>

The second indicator of a government's political will is its provision of adequate legal powers, personnel, and budget to enable the anti-corruption agency to perform its functions effectively. Table 9.8 provides comparative data on the budgets and personnel of eight anti-corruption agencies in Asia as well as their staff-population ratios and per capita expenditures. Among the eight anti-corruption agencies, Macao's Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) fares best with a staff-population ratio of 1:4,358 and a per capita expenditure of US\$21.72. Hong Kong's ICAC is second, with a staff-population ratio of 1:5,863 and a per capita expenditure of US\$12.14. Singapore's CPIB is ranked third, with a staff-population ratio of 1:53,086 and a per capita expenditure of US\$1.79.

However, the other five anti-corruption agencies are poorly funded and staffed, with Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (CEC) having the highest staff-population ratio of 1:729, 836 and the lowest per capita expenditure of US\$0.08. The staff-population ratios of the other four

agencies are also unfavorable: 1:69,481 for Thailand's National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC); 1:85,057 for the Philippines' Ombudsman; 1:229,505 for India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI); and 1:233,171 for South Korea's Korea Independent Commission against Corruption (KICAC). Similarly, the per capita expenditures of these agencies are also low: US\$0.37 for the KICAC; US\$0.36 for the NCCC; US\$0.28 for the CBI; and US\$0.15 for the Ombudsman.

The comparative analysis in [Table 9.8](#) shows that the political leaders in South Korea, Thailand, India, Philippines, and Indonesia must demonstrate their political will in curbing corruption by increasing substantially the legal powers, personnel, and budgets of their anti-corruption agencies. For example, the KICAC was not a full-fledged anti-corruption agency as it did not perform the major function required of an anti-corruption agency namely, investigating corruption offenses, and its scope was restricted to dealing with public sector corruption only.<sup>16</sup> The South Korean political leaders must remove these two serious obstacles to the KICAC's and ACRC's effective performance if they are committed to curbing corruption in their country.

Similarly, instead of strengthening the CEC, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had unwittingly undermined its effectiveness in May 2005 when he formed an anti-corruption taskforce of prosecutors, police, and auditors to compete with the CEC ([Quah, 2006](#), pp. 178–179). The conflict and competition between the CEC and the police and the Attorney-General's Office (AGO) erupted recently in the arrest of two senior CEC officials by the police allegedly for bribery. The arrest of these officials in the wake of the arrest of the CEC Chairman for murder is widely viewed as “an apparent high-level conspiracy” by the police and AGO to weaken the CEC.<sup>17</sup>

### *9.7.2. Lesson 2: The Anti-Corruption Agency must be Independent from the Police and from Political Control*

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Singapore's experience in fighting corruption clearly shows the importance of not allowing the police to be responsible for corruption control especially when the police are corrupt. The CPIB's success confirms the importance of not making the police responsible for corruption control as this would be like giving candy to a child and expecting him or her not to eat it ([Quah, 2004](#), p. 2). Singapore has taken 15 years (1937–1952) and Hong Kong 26 years (1948–1974) to learn this important lesson.

Unfortunately, other Asian countries like India for example has not learnt this lesson yet as it continues to rely on the police to curb corruption. Indeed, the CBI in India is not independent of the police as the CBI's Director is also the Inspector-General of Police. As police corruption is rampant in India, it is surprising that the government has continued to rely on the CBI (which was formed in 1963) for the past 46 years to curb corruption even though this traditional British method of relying on the police for corruption control is ineffective (Quah, 2008b, pp. 253–254).

Apart from being independent from the police, the anti-corruption agency must be independent from political control in two respects. First, the political leaders should not interfere in the daily operations of the anti-corruption agency. The second and more important concern is that the anti-corruption agency should be able to investigate political leaders and senior civil servants without fear or favor if they are accused of corruption (Quah, 2008a, p. 96). The CPIB's location within the Prime Minister's Office in Singapore since 1969 has raised concern that corrupt Asian political leaders could use the CPIB-style agency against their political rivals. However, as discussed earlier, this concern is unwarranted in Singapore's case as the CPIB has investigated all allegations of corruption against political leaders and senior bureaucrats during the past 50 years. As the CPIB's Director can investigate the Prime Minister for corruption if he obtains the consent of the Elected President, no one is immune from being investigated by the CPIB if a complaint is made. Furthermore, it should be noted that the PAP government has remained committed to minimizing corruption in Singapore and has not used the CPIB as a weapon against the opposition political leaders since it assumed power in June 1959.

### *9.7.3. Lesson 3: The Anti-Corruption Agency must be Incorruptible*

The anti-corruption agency must be incorruptible for two reasons. First, if the anti-corruption agency's personnel are corrupt, its legitimacy and public image will be undermined as its officers have broken the law by being corrupt themselves when they are required to enforce the law. Second, corruption among the anti-corruption agency's staff not only discredits the agency but also prevents them from performing their duties impartially and effectively.

To illustrate, the Board of Inspection and Follow-up of Government Operations (BIFGO) was established as the first anti-corruption agency in Thailand in September 1972 to investigate allegations of corruption against government agencies and officials. However, BIFGO was dissolved after the

October 1973 Revolution as its five members were found guilty of corruption themselves (Quah, 1982a, pp. 171–172). Another example is provided by the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) in the Philippines, which was created by President Corazon Aquino in February 1986. Unfortunately, the PCGG became a target for charges of corruption, favoritism, and incompetence, and by June 1988, five PCGG agents faced graft charges and 13 more were under investigation (Timberman, 1991, pp. 233–234).

To ensure its integrity, the anti-corruption agency must be staffed by honest and competent personnel. Overstaffing should be avoided and any staff member found guilty of corruption must be punished and dismissed. Details of the punishment of corrupt staff of the anti-corruption agency must be widely publicized in the mass media to serve as a deterrent to others, and to demonstrate the agency's integrity and credibility to the public. In 1997, a senior CPIB officer was found guilty of cheating a businessman in Singapore. The CPIB's Director, Chua Cher Yak, ordered polygraph tests for all his staff, including himself, to demonstrate their integrity. The CPIB's reputation remained untarnished as Chua and his colleagues passed the polygraph tests (Fong, 2005, p. H7).

#### *9.7.4. Lesson 4: Curb Corruption by Increasing Salaries, Cutting Red Tape, and Punishing Corrupt Offenders*

Leslie Palmier identified three major causes of corruption in his comparative study of the control of bureaucratic corruption in Hong Kong, India, and Indonesia. According to him:

[B]ureaucratic corruption seems to depend not on any one of the [three] factors identified, but rather on the balance between them. At one extreme, with few opportunities, good salaries, and effective policing, corruption will be minimal; at the other, with many opportunities, poor salaries, and weak policing, it will be considerable. (Palmier, 1985, pp. 271–272)

In other words, corruption results from the combined effect of ample opportunities, low salaries, and the low probability of detection and punishment for corrupt behavior. Thus, to combat corruption effectively, the governments in other Asian countries should introduce reforms to eliminate these three causes.

It is unrealistic to expect civil servants and political leaders to remain honest if they are paid low salaries which are inadequate for meeting their daily needs. Accordingly, they should be paid decent salaries instead of

“starvation wages” to insulate them from bribery and patronage. However, as increasing salaries is expensive, only those Asian countries which have sustained economic growth can afford to do so.

Singapore’s experience during 1959–1971 shows that it is possible to curb corruption by impartially enforcing the anti-corruption laws without increasing the salaries of civil servants and political leaders. Furthermore, increasing salaries curbs petty corruption as it reduces the incentive for corruption among junior civil servants but does not eliminate grand corruption among senior civil servants and politicians. Finally, raising salaries alone will not solve the problem of corruption if the incumbent government lacks the political will to do so. In other words, salary revision is a necessary but insufficient condition for curbing corruption if other reforms are not undertaken also.

Corrupt civil servants in many Asian countries love red tape because it provides them with many opportunities to solicit or accept bribes from business persons or the public to expedite the processing of their applications or to “jump the queue.” Corruption can be minimized in the civil service if red tape is cut and its efficiency is improved (Quah, 2009a, p. 836). Singapore’s measures to reduce red tape have been effective as reflected in its number one ranking on the ease of doing business from 2007 to 2009 on the World Bank’s *Doing Business Survey*. Table 9.9 shows clearly the linkage between the ease of doing business and the perceived level of corruption in six Asian countries. The level of perceived corruption in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan, where it is easier to do business, is much lower than in India, Philippines, and Cambodia, where it is much more difficult to conduct business because of the greater amount of red tape. For example, in Cambodia, which is ranked 158th on the 2009 CPI with a score of 2.0, it takes 85 days to start a business, 709 days to deal with construction permits, and 56 days to register a property.

As not all public agencies are equally vulnerable to corruption, those governments in other Asian countries should identify those “wet” agencies that are prone to corruption so that the opportunities for corruption in such agencies can be reduced by cutting unnecessary red tape and improved monitoring of their operations. In addition to the police, the other “wet” public agencies are the customs, immigration, education, health, public works, and tax departments. For example, Nick Manning of the World Bank have identified these 11 “wet” agencies in Indonesia viz., defense, education and culture, mining and energy, public works, forestry, finance, home affairs, religious affairs, health, national development planning agency (BAPPENAS), and transmigration (Manning, 2000, p. 71).

Singapore’s experience demonstrates the importance of punishing corrupt offenders, regardless of their status or position, in order to deter others from

**Table 9.9.** Ease of Doing Business in Six Asian Countries (2009).

Indicator	Singapore	Hong Kong	Japan	India	Philippines	Cambodia
Ease of doing business (rank)	1	4	12	122	140	135
Starting a business (rank)	10	15	64	121	155	169
Number of procedures	4	5	8	13	15	9
Time (days)	4	11	23	30	52	85
Cost (% of GNI per capita)	0.7	2.0	7.5	70.1	29.8	151.7
Dealing with construction permits (rank)	2	20	39	136	105	147
Number of procedures	11	15	15	20	24	23
Time (days)	38	119	187	224	203	709
Cost (% of income per capita)	21.2	18.7	19.1	414.7	90.1	64.3
Registering property (rank)	16	74	51	105	97	108
Number of procedures	3	5	6	6	8	7
Time (days)	9	54	14	45	33	56
Cost (% of property value)	2.8	5.0	5.0	7.5	4.3	4.4
CPI 2009 Rank and Score	3rd (9.2)	12th (8.2)	17th (7.7)	84th (3.4)	139th (2.4)	158th (2.0)

Sources: The World Bank (2008, pp. 94, 109, 110, 112, 128, 133) and [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi\\_2009/cpi\\_2009\\_table](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi_2009/cpi_2009_table).

being corrupt. Corruption was perceived by the population in Singapore as a low risk, high reward activity during the British colonial period as the probability of being detected and punished for corrupt offenses was low because the ACB was ineffective. On the other hand, the empowerment of the CPIB by the enactment of the POCA in 1960 by the PAP government led to the transformation of the public perception of corruption to a high risk, low reward activity.

To minimize corruption and to deter those who are not involved in corrupt practices from doing so, honesty and incorruptibility among civil servants and political leaders must be recognized and rewarded instead of being punished. The lack of punishment of corrupt civil servants and political leaders in a country sends the wrong signal to their honest counterparts and the population at large as it makes a mockery of the anti-corruption laws and encourages others to become corrupt as the probability of being caught and punished is low. Since a corrupt political system rewards those who are corrupt and punishes those who are honest, the system of reward and punishment must be reversed by punishing the corrupt offenders and rewarding those who are incorrupt if a country wishes to eradicate corruption.

In sum, the fourth lesson which other Asian countries can learn from Singapore's effective anti-corruption strategy is the importance of observing the logic of corruption control by tackling the three causes and not the symptoms of corruption by improving the salaries of civil servants and political leaders (if the country can afford to do so), reducing red tape and the opportunities for corruption in corruption-prone public agencies, and punishing those who are guilty of corruption, no matter who they are.

## NOTES

1. See [http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary\\_/corruption.html](http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/corruption.html), accessed on 20 December 2008.
2. *Straits Times*, 4 October 1887, quoted in Quah (1979, p. 29).
3. For more details of this election, see Ong (1973).
4. Quoted in Quah (1978b, p. 10), emphasis added.
5. The original POCA had 32 sections. However, it was expanded to 37 sections after several amendments. The full text of the Prevention of Corruption Act, Chapter 241 is available from [http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non\\_version/cgi-bin/cgi\\_retrieve.pl?actno = REVED241&doctitle = PREVENTION%20OF%20CORRUPTION%20ACT%0a&date = latest&method = part](http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?actno = REVED241&doctitle = PREVENTION%20OF%20CORRUPTION%20ACT%0a&date = latest&method = part).
6. *Straits Times*, 26 October 1981, p. 1.
7. This Act was expanded and renamed as the Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Serious Crimes (Confiscation of Benefits) Act, Chapter 65A in 1999.
8. Information provided by CPIB senior officers in an interview on 27 June 2008.
9. Soh (2008a, pp. 1–2). Mr Soh is the current Director of the CPIB.
10. Government departments and statutory boards in Singapore can book corruption prevention talks for their officers online on preferred dates and times from the CPIB's website at [http://app.cpiib.gov.sg/cpiib\\_new/user/default.aspx?pgld = 215](http://app.cpiib.gov.sg/cpiib_new/user/default.aspx?pgld = 215)
11. See CPIB (2003b) and Tan (2003, p. 6).
12. "CPIB on the fast track," *Challenge*, November 2006, available at [http://www.ps21.gov.sg/Challenge/2006\\_11/system.html](http://www.ps21.gov.sg/Challenge/2006_11/system.html), accessed on 27 July 2009.
13. See World Bank (2006, p. 6; 2007, p. 6; 2008, p. 6). These three reports are available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/>
14. "Cambodia: Hun Sen says critics 'misunderstand' anti-corruption bill," *Brunei Times*, 17 October 2006.
15. See [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi2009/cpi\\_2009\\_table](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi2009/cpi_2009_table), accessed on 24 November 2009.
16. On 29 February 2008, the KICAC was merged with the Ombudsman and the Administrative Appeals Commission to form the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC). However, like the KICAC, the ACRC does not have the power to investigate corruption cases.
17. See Osman (2009, p. A9). The Indonesian equivalent for CEC is *Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi* (KPK). See also Onishi (2009, p. A10).

# CHAPTER 10

## THE PAP GOVERNMENT'S PHILOSOPHY OF GOVERNANCE

We believed in socialism, in fair shares for all. Later we learnt that personal motivation and personal rewards were essential for a productive economy. However, because people are unequal in their abilities, if performance and rewards are determined by the marketplace, there will be few big winners, many medium winners, and a considerable number of losers. ... We chose to redistribute wealth by asset enhancement, not by subsidies for consumption. Those who are not winners of top prizes in the free market will still get valuable consolation prizes for competing in the marathon of life.

– Lee (2000b, pp. 116 and 126)

The previous six chapters analyze some of the major policies introduced by the People's Action Party (PAP) government during its past 50 years in power. Chapter 4 explains why the PAP government decided to rely on statutory boards for the implementation of various socio-economic development programs in Singapore. Chapter 5 focuses on the Public Service Commission's role in maintaining the policy of meritocracy in Singapore. Chapter 6 discusses the rationale and consequences of paying competitive salaries to ministers and senior civil servants in Singapore. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with the implementation of several important administrative reforms including the comprehensive reforms of 1959–1960, the budgetary reforms of 1978–1997, and Public Service for the 21st century. The previous chapter describes and explains why Singapore's comprehensive anti-corruption strategy has been effective.

This chapter provides a framework for understanding these policies by analyzing the PAP leaders' philosophy of governance in terms of their objectives, assumptions about human nature, and strategies for intervention. It concludes with an evaluation of their philosophy of governance and argues that the price of success paid by Singaporeans for the restrictions in their freedom of speech and assembly is not too high and certainly better than paying the price of failure if the PAP government had been ineffective.

## 10.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAP GOVERNMENT

In its campaign for the May 1959 general election, the PAP leaders' electoral platform identified the following 10 objectives:

1. Independence through merger with Malaya.
2. Promote and give assistance to industrial development and to establish an Economic Development Board.
3. Develop agriculture and fishery.
4. Reorganize and streamline government departments. Eradicate red tape, bureaucratic practices, and duplication of functions. Abolish the City Council and [ensure] that its various functions be absorbed in relevant government departments.
5. Extend and promote the setting up of vocational training schools, technical colleges, and improve the science and technological departments of University of Malaya and Nanyang University.
6. Build more schools. To implement the recommendations of the 1955 All-Party Chinese Education Report.
7. To build a strong and united trade union movement. To establish an Industrial Arbitration Court to resolve industrial disputes based on the principle of mutual benefit.
8. To carry out a low-cost housing program.
9. To raise the status of women and legislate a Women's Charter – providing among other things, penalty for polygamy. Encourage women's participation in political, social, educational, professional and other activities, and employment.
10. Recognize the special position of the Malay people, to protect and look after their interests; to encourage the study of the Malay language (Fong, 1980, pp. 71–72).

However, after Singapore's independence and separation from Malaysia on 9 August 1965, the PAP leaders were forced to change their vision of Singapore as part of Malaysia to Singapore as an independent nation, which they had earlier rejected. In other words, the PAP leaders had to “reinvent” Singapore to ensure its survival.

In October 1960, the PAP government invited an industrial survey team from the United Nations Technical Assistance Board (the United Nations Development Program's predecessor) to provide advice on “Singapore's potential for industrial expansion” (Drysdale, 1984, p. 250). The team leader was Dr Albert Winsemius, an industrial economist from the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> After three months, Winsemius submitted his report to the PAP government

and identified three prerequisites for Singapore's success in industrialization: a resourceful population; "an active industrial promotion program, and close cooperation between employers and labor" (Drysdale, 1984, p. 251).

Winsemius was pessimistic about Singapore's economic prospects as he reported that the expatriates in Singapore in late 1960 felt that Singapore "was going down the drain" and "was not a good starting point for investments or loans" (Drysdale, 1984, p. 252). In 1961, he advised Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew that Singapore's industrialization program would only succeed if he did two things:

Number one is: get rid of the Communists; how you get rid of them does not interest me as an economist, but get them out of the government, get them out of the unions, get them off the streets. How you do it, is your job.

Number two is: let Raffles stand where he stands today; say publicly that you accept the heavy ties with the West because you will very much need them in your economic program.<sup>2</sup>

In his memoirs, Lee Kuan Yew described his initial reaction to Winsemius' twin proposals thus:

To tell me in 1961, when the communist united front was at the height of its power and pulverizing the PAP government day after day, that I should eliminate the communists left me speechless as I laughed at the absurdity of his simple solution. To keep Raffles' statue was easy. ... Letting it remain would be a symbol of public acceptance of the British heritage and could have a positive effect. (Lee, 2000b, p. 67)

Nevertheless, Lee accepted Winsemius' advice and took appropriate measures to maintain Singapore's political stability by reducing labor unrest and the influence of the communists.

This first objective of maintaining political stability in Singapore is important for attracting foreign investment and enhancing global competitiveness. As Singapore has no natural resources, the PAP government's second objective is to ensure that there is continued economic growth to provide sufficient jobs for citizens to give them a stake in the country (Quah, 1985a, p. 200). In short, the PAP government's twin goals are: to maintain Singapore's political stability; and to maximize its economic growth so that Singaporeans can attain the "good life."

### *10.1.1. The "Good Life" in Singapore*

What is the "good life" in Singapore? In 1973, Theodore and Frances Geiger observed that the PAP regime had "very definite ideas as to what

should and should not be included in the Singapore conception of the good life” which included “improvements in housing, urban amenities, education, and health” (Geiger & Geiger, 1983, p. 201). Indeed, many Singaporeans are concerned with the pursuit of material rewards today as manifested in their concern with the five ‘C’s of cash, car, condominium, credit card, and career.<sup>3</sup> In its 1999 report, the Singapore 21 Committee rejected this narrow definition of success and recommended that:

As a society, we must widen our definition of success to go beyond the academic and the economic. We must not be seized by the five ‘C’s of cash, car, condo[mini]um, credit card and career, that we lose sight of more enduring traits like character, courage, commitment, compassion and creativity. (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999, p. 11)

Indeed, the Singapore 21 vision requires, among other things, “a refocusing from mere self-interest – a scramble for the 5 ‘C’s – to the interests of community and nation” (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999, p. 58).

A 2001 survey of the values and lifestyles of a random sample of 1,500 Singapore citizens and permanent residents found that the top three things valued by the respondents varied according to the ethnic group. The Chinese respondents valued in the order of preference health, personal safety, and happiness. The Malay respondents valued happiness, health, and love. The Indian respondents were concerned with happiness, personal safety and success (Kau, Jung, Tambyah, & Tan, 2004, p. 45). Table 10.1 shows that wealth was the eighth most valued item by the Chinese respondents, and the 11th most valued item by both the Malay and Indian respondents. The percentage of respondents wishing for wealth was highest among the Chinese (67.1 percent), followed by the Indians (60.9 percent), and the Malays (53.3 percent).

A more recent survey of a random sample of 400 Singaporeans between 18 and 64 years conducted during October–November 2008 found that the “Top 10 Singaporean Dreams” in 2009 had differed from the choice of the 2008 survey respondents. Table 10.2 shows the shift in priorities as reflected in the change in the top three choices from “seeing the world,” “self-improvement,” and “making money” in 2008 to “family and children,” “settling down/starting a family,” and “house and home” in 2009 (Singapore Dreaming, 2009, p. 3).<sup>4</sup>

## 10.2. ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HUMAN NATURE

In their comparative study, Florence R. Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodbeck have observed that assumptions about human nature vary according to the

**Table 10.1.** Things Wanted Most in Life by Ethnic Group.

Rank	Chinese (%)	Malay (%)	Indian (%)
1	Health 78.3	Happiness 69.0	Happiness 77.3
2	Personal safety 74.3	Health 68.5	Personal safety 74.6
3	Happiness 73.3	Love 65.2	Success 74.5
4	Security 71.4	Peace of mind 65.2	Freedom 73.7
5	Success 70.9	Personal safety 65.2	Health 71.8
6	Peace of mind 70.2	Success 63.5	Security 69.1
7	Love 68.1	Security 62.5	Love 66.4
8	Wealth 67.1	Friendship 59.8	Peace of mind 65.5
9	Freedom 65.5	Freedom 55.5	Friendship 65.4
10	Friendship 65.1	Luck 55.4	Luck 64.5
11	Luck 64.6	Wealth 53.3	Wealth 60.9
12	Social status 58.8	Leisure time 52.2	Power 58.2
13	Leisure time 57.9	Power 52.2	Social status 56.4
14	Power 57.2	Social status 51.1	Youthfulness 56.4
15	Youthfulness 54.6	Youthfulness 50.5	Leisure time 54.6
16	Good looks 46.2	Good looks 38.0	Good looks 41.8

Source: Kau et al. (2004, p. 45, Table 3.13).

**Table 10.2.** Singaporean Dreams and Goals (2008–2009).

Rank	2008	2009
1	Seeing the world	Family and children
2	Self-improvement	Settling down/Starting a Family
3	Making money	House and home
4	House and home	Making money
5	Good health	Retirement
6	Family and children	Seeing the world
7	Charity and volunteering	Automobile
8	Automobile	Good health
9	Starting a business	Starting a business
10	Retirement	Self-improvement

Source: Singapore Dreaming (2009, p. 3), available at <http://www.askocbc.com>

society as “in some societies humans are seen as basically evil, in others as basically good, and in still others as mixed or neutral, capable of being either good or bad.”<sup>5</sup> At the organizational level, Edgar H. Schein has indicated that the assumptions about human nature have evolved from viewing (1) humans as rational-economic actors to (2) humans as social animals with

primarily social needs to (3) humans as problem solvers and self-actualizers and to (4) humans as complex and malleable” (Schein, 2004, p. 172).

Lawrence S. Wrightsman has argued that assumptions about human nature are important in everyday life as people usually justify their decisions about an individual on the basis of their assumptions about human nature in general (Wrightsman, 1992, p. 14). Furthermore, Leslie Stevenson and David L. Haberman contend that “Different conceptions of human nature lead to different views about what we ought to do and how we can do it” (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998, p. 4).

In his analysis of Theory X, Douglas McGregor has contended that “behind every managerial decision or action are assumptions about human nature and human behavior” (McGregor, 1960, p. 33). Theory X’s three assumptions about human nature are:

1. The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can.
2. Because of this human dislike of work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement of organizational objectives.
3. The average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, and has relatively little ambition, wants security above all (McGregor, 1960, pp. 33–34).

As Theory X is based on the “carrot-and-stick” theory of motivation, it “does not work at all once man has reached an adequate subsistence level and is motivated primarily by higher needs” (McGregor, 1960, p. 41). Accordingly, McGregor has recommended Theory Y as an alternative to Theory X because Theory Y “assumes that people will exercise self-direction and self-control in the achievement of organizational objectives to the degree that they are committed to those objectives” (McGregor, 1960, p. 56).

In the same vein, Harry Levinson has identified “the carrot and stick philosophy” of reward and punishment as the “dominant philosophy of motivation of American management.” He describes the “unconscious assumption behind the reward-punishment model” as the Great Jackass Fallacy because “the first image that comes to mind when one thinks ‘carrot-and-stick’ is a jackass” and that “people are jackasses to be manipulated and controlled” (Levinson, 1973, p. 10). However, this fallacy has negative consequences because

When people sense themselves to be viewed as jackasses, they will automatically resist hearing management's messages, no matter how clear the type or pretty the pictures. (Levinson, 1973, p. 11)

Similarly, behind every public policy are assumptions about human nature which are made by the policy-makers in their definition of the policy problem and the selection of the policy alternatives for resolving the problem. In view of the two objectives of maintaining Singapore's political stability and maximizing its economic growth, the PAP leaders' assumptions about human nature are important as these assumptions also influence the selected strategies for intervention.

First, the PAP leaders have an elitist view of human nature as they do not believe in the equality of all men and women as some of them are more equal than the rest. For example, graduates are viewed to be superior to non-graduates, and the elites are considered to be more intelligent than the masses. Consequently, the elites formulate policies for the masses as "public policy does not reflect the demands of masses but rather the prevailing values of the elite" (Dye, 2002, p. 24).

Elite theory assumes that the public are "apathetic and ill informed about public policy" and that "elites actually shape mass opinion on policy questions more than masses shape elite opinion" (Dye, 2002, p. 23). In other words, public policies reflect elite preferences and civil servants implement the policies formulated by the elite (see [Box 10.1](#)). As such, policy-making is top-down rather than bottom-up. Hence, it is not surprising that in Singapore, given the PAP leaders' elitist assumption of human nature, policies tend to be formulated by the elites rather than the masses.

In his recent analysis of meritocracy and elitism in Singapore, Kenneth Paul Tan observes that the "deeply paternalistic" PAP government "believes it has a duty to force ordinary Singaporeans to be 'free' of their base desires ... and to do this by replacing 'politics' with public administration" (Tan, 2008, p. 12). According to him:

The political formula dictates that the government knows better, so that even with increasing consultation with the public, it must have the final say on everything from personal conduct to sexual behavior to artistic value. (Tan, 2008, p. 12)

The PAP leaders' elitist view of human nature can be attributed to their predominance in Parliament as they have constituted a majority there since their election in the May 1959 general election and the elitist tradition introduced by the British colonial government. The PAP won 43 of the 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly in the May 1959 general election. Since

**Box 10.1.** Assumptions of the Elite Model

1. Society is divided into the few who have power and the many who do not. Only a small number of persons allocate values for society; the masses do not decide public policy.
2. The few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socio-economic strata of society.
3. The movement of non-elites to elite positions must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolution. Only non-elites who have accepted the basic elite consensus can be admitted to governing circles.
4. Elites share consensus in behalf of the basic values of the social system and the preservation of the system.
5. Public policy does not reflect the demands of masses but rather the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary.
6. Active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from apathetic masses. Elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

*Source:* Dye (2002, pp. 23–24).

then, the PAP has been re-elected 11 times and it holds 82 of the 84 parliamentary seats after winning the May 2006 general election.

The British colonial government had “developed a ‘steel frame’ of administration animated by a guardian class of civil servants” (Guyot, 1966, p. 354) in its colonies in Burma (now known as Myanmar), Ceylon (now known as Sri Lanka), India, Malaya, Nepal, Pakistan, and Singapore. According to Taylor Cole, the impact of the British bureaucratic heritage is the “pervasiveness of the elitist tradition, which incorporates elements of careful selectivity, prestige, a corporate identity, common objectives, and substantial discretion in the choice of means to attain them” (Cole, 1966). In his comparative analysis of the bureaucracies in Burma, Ceylon, India, Malaya, and Pakistan, Ralph Braibanti has observed that, except for Pakistan, “whatever ideological components of the British legacy remained were rediffused, not by British officers themselves, but by British-trained indigenous officers who as the elite cadres staffed all crucial positions” (Braibanti, 1966, pp. 644–645).

As policy formulation “involves the development of pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action for dealing with public problems” (Anderson, 1979, p. 63), most of the public policies in Singapore are formulated by the Cabinet, which is the supreme policy-making body of the government. According to article 24 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, the Cabinet has “the general direction and control of the government” and is “collectively responsible to Parliament.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, each minister has control and direction of a staff of civil servants in his ministry. The role of the civil servants is to provide the necessary information, advice, and past experience to the Cabinet, which will then discuss and evaluate this information before recommending an appropriate policy.

During his term as prime minister (June 1959 to November 1990), Lee Kuan Yew was the dominant figure in the inner circle of the Cabinet as his influence prevailed in the formulation of public policies. In his 1989 analysis of the PAP leadership, Robert O. Tilman described Lee as “the hub” of the first orbit of leadership, with Goh Keng Swee, Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, and Toh Chin Chye as the other three members (Tilman, 1989, pp. 54–56). Indeed, in 1979 Lee was responsible for initiating both the National Courtesy Campaign and the Speak Mandarin Campaign. He admitted that the National Courtesy Campaign was initiated “at my prodding” and he launched it on 1 June 1979 because

We must teach children and persuade adults to be courteous to each other. We want to be courteous because life will be better for all. Courtesy is part of all cultivated societies. It is a desirable attribute in itself. (Lee, 1979b, p. 1)

Bearing in mind his elitist assumption of human nature and his belief in eugenics, it was not surprising that the Graduate Mothers' Priority Scheme was introduced in January 1984 to encourage graduate mothers to have more children by giving those graduate mothers with three or more children top priority in registering their children for primary one classes in schools of their choice (Quah, 1985b, p. 221). However, this scheme was abandoned a year later as it was widely criticized by the public, especially non-graduate mothers and graduate fathers who felt that their children were discriminated against because their mothers did not have university degrees.

Second, the PAP leaders have a negative view of human nature as they assume that men and women are motivated by economic incentives and discouraged by disincentives. In other words, they have adopted a carrot-and-stick approach by providing incentives and disincentives to motivate Singaporeans to behave accordingly. This approach is manifested in the incentives provided for family planning in the 1960s and 1970s and, more

recently, in the various incentives to encourage Singaporeans to have more children after 1987.<sup>7</sup> In this connection, Gillian Davidson has argued that, in addition to non-graduate women, single mothers have also been marginalized as they have been excluded from “mainstream planning and policy-making” in Singapore (Davidson, 1999, p. 85).

In his critique of the Great Jackass Fallacy, Levinson has astutely observed that “stubbornness, stupidity, willfulness, and unwillingness to go where someone is driving him” are the characteristics of both jackasses and unmotivated employees. More importantly, this fallacy results in a self-fulfilling prophecy because “people will inevitably respond to the carrot-and-stick by trying to get more of the carrot and by protecting them against the stick” (Levinson, 1973, p. 10). Levinson warns of these consequences if this fallacy is not abandoned and if the military-style bureaucratic structure is not changed:

People will avoid, evade, escape, deny, and reject both the jackass assumption and the military style hierarchy, for few people can tolerate being a jackass in a psychological prison without doing something about it. (Levinson, 1973, p. 13)

Indeed, the limited success of the PAP government’s reliance on economic incentives to curb the exodus of talented Division I civil servants to the private sector (discussed in Chapter 6) and to increase the birth rate of Singaporeans demonstrates the disadvantages of relying on a negative view of human nature and the carrot-and-stick approach to motivate people’s behavior. As Singaporeans are now better educated and well traveled, “they resent increasing government control over their lives, and they do not want controversial policies that affect them to be formulated and implemented without taking their views and sentiments into account” (Quah, 1985b, p. 227).

The 12.6 percent decline in votes for the PAP in the December 1984 general election sent a signal to the PAP government that many voters, especially the 37 percent who voted for the opposition, wanted a change in the style of government and to be consulted and involved in the public policy-making process (Quah, 1989b, p. 2). Accordingly, the PAP government formed the Feedback Unit on 13 March 1985 to provide Singaporeans with “a forum to understand major policies, ask questions, make suggestions, and generally participate in working out a solution” (Feedback Unit, 2004, p. 12). The seven-month long debate on the National Agenda was launched in February 1987 to “enable all Singaporeans to participate in formulating the means of attaining the goals identified in the Government’s Vision of 1999” (Feedback Unit, 2004, p. 2). Indeed, according to Lee Hsien Loong, the Agenda for Action was “the result of much consultation and soul-searching” (Lee, 1988, p. 57).

### **10.3. STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTION**

What are the strategies for intervention introduced by the PAP government to attain the two objectives of maintaining political stability and maximizing economic growth? The PAP government has initiated nine strategies for intervention as shown in **Box 10.2**.

#### *10.3.1. Meeting the Basic Needs of the Population*

In June 1959, the newly elected PAP government inherited an economy based on entrepot trade, an unemployment rate of 14 percent, a GDP per capita of S\$1,330 (US\$443), and a severe housing shortage as 50 percent of the population were living in squatter huts. To solve the housing shortage, the PAP government established the Housing and Development Board (HDB) in February 1960 to implement the First Five-Year Building Program (1960–1965). As shown in Chapter 4, the HDB exceeded the program's building target of 51,031 housing units by 3,399 housing units in 1965 at a cost of S\$192.1 million and a savings of S\$2 million. By December 2008, the HDB has constructed an impressive total of 1,018,674 housing units and commercial buildings. The proportion of the population living in public housing in Singapore has increased from 9 percent in 1959 to 82 percent in 2008 as a result of the HDB's effective public housing program.

To solve the growing unemployment problem, the Economic Development Board (EDB) was formed in August 1961 to attract foreign investment

#### **Box 10.2.** The PAP Government's Nine Strategies for Intervention

1. Meeting the basic needs of the population.
2. Maintaining the tradition of meritocracy.
3. Minimizing corruption to ensure clean government.
4. Investing in education to enhance the population.
5. Minimizing the potential for racial and/or religious conflict.
6. Preventing internal subversion by relying on the Internal Security Act.
7. Learning from other countries' experiences in solving problems.
8. Rejecting the idea of the welfare state.
9. Adopting a proactive and interventionist leadership style.

in Singapore. At the EDB's 10th anniversary in August 1971, the Minister for Finance, Hon Sui Sen, indicated that the EDB had made "satisfactory progress" as the GDP had increased by 2.5 times, the manufacturing workforce had grown from 28,000 in 1961 to 150,000 in 1971, and direct exports from manufactured products in 1971 was 12.5 times higher than the 1961 figure (Hon, 1997, p. 376). More recently, the EDB's effectiveness in attracting foreign investment is reflected in Singapore's ranking as second in the world after Switzerland and the best Asian country for investment potential by the August 2006 *BERI Report*.<sup>8</sup>

### *10.3.2. Maintaining the Tradition of Meritocracy*

Meritocracy was introduced to Singapore by the British colonial government in January 1951 when it established the Public Service Commission (PSC) to ensure that recruitment and promotion in the civil service was based on merit. The PAP government not only retained the PSC and the tradition of meritocracy, it also de-emphasized the importance of seniority in promotion and devolved most of the PSC's functions to personnel boards in the ministries from 1995.

In April 1971, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stressed the critical importance of meritocracy in the selection of Singapore's leadership:

Outstanding men in civil service, the police, the armed forces, chairmen of statutory boards and their top administrators have worked out the details of policies set by the government and seen to their implementation. . . . Singapore is a meritocracy. And these men have risen to the top by their own merit, hard work, and high performance. Together they are a closely-knit and coordinated hardcore. If all 300 were to crash in one jumbo jet, then Singapore will disintegrate.<sup>9</sup>

Thomas J. Bellows has described Singapore as "a demanding meritocracy" as its "future leadership is recruited and tested according to rigid criteria" (Bellows, 1989, p. 206). More recently, Bellows (2009) has observed that the "commitment to meritocracy" has been "institutionalized in Singapore's political system" and is "unwavering under the third generation of leaders represented by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong" (Bellows, 2009, p. 31). Another American scholar, Edgar H. Schein, has attributed Singapore's success to its incorruptible and competent civil service as "having 'the best and brightest' in government is probably one of Singapore's major strengths in that they are potentially the most able to invent what the country needs to survive and grow" (Schein, 1996, pp. 221–222).

### *10.3.3. Minimizing Corruption to Ensure Clean Government*

In 1979, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew identified six basic principles which had guided him and his colleagues during their first two decades in office. One of these principles was: “Stay clean: dismiss the venal.” He elaborated on this key principle thus:

We have run the government in a honest, fair, and efficient manner. This is easier said than done; for once in office the temptations are great and the desire to pardon old political comrades for indiscretions is natural. We have resisted the easy way out of embarrassing and difficult situations, even when it has meant the dismissal of a former Cabinet Minister, like Tan Kia Gan, from all his public positions . . . in November 1966, or the painful prosecution of a Minister of State, like Wee Toon Boon. Whether it is licenses for hawkers and taxi drivers, or balloting for flats, or tenders for millions of dollars’ worth of government contracts, PAP members, MPs and Ministers have not taken advantage of their positions. The leadership as individuals and as a group has not allowed it and will not tolerate it. (Lee, 1979a, p. 38)

Singapore’s lack of natural resources and the consequences of corrupt leadership in other Asian countries made the PAP leaders realize the necessity of maintaining a clean government to attract foreign investment and to minimize corruption by strengthening the anti-corruption measures. In addition to political stability, they believed that foreign investors would only be attracted to Singapore “if the government and civil service were competent, incorruptible, and operated with an open and consistent set of rules that were vigorously enforced” (Schein, 1996, pp. 169–170).

Even though the PAP government has been in power for the past 50 years, it has remained committed to minimizing corruption as manifested in its consistently high ranking and scores on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index from 1995 to 2009. In spite of the absence of an effective opposition in Parliament and a free press, the PAP government has remained clean and not succumbed to corruption since it assumed office in June 1959 (Quah, 2009b, pp. 139–144).

### *10.3.4. Investing in Education to Improve the Population*

The lack of natural resources compelled the PAP government to invest heavily in education to improve the skills of its citizens. Former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong remarked that the absence of natural resources was a blessing to Singapore because it led to the emphasis on education and training to develop the population (Chua, 1997). Singapore’s investment in

education is not unique as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan also share the Confucian belief in the “perfectibility and educability of human beings,” which is an important aspect of Chinese culture (Tai, 1989, p. 24).

Accordingly, it is not surprising that “all East Asian societies have rushed to invest heavily in human resources.” Education is revered as “parents, teachers, and students treat education almost like a national religion” and governments “devote considerable resources to a frantic expansion of schools and classes” (Tai, 1989, p. 25). This is manifested in East Asia’s “greater expansion of enrollment in secondary schools and in higher education than any other group of countries in the world” during 1965–1985 (Tai, 1989, p. 25).

In Singapore’s case, Table 10.3 shows that the government’s expenditure on education has increased by 134 times from S\$61.4 million in 1960 to S\$8,246.2 million in 2008. The enrolment in educational institutions has nearly doubled from 352,952 in 1960 to 704,117 in 2008. Furthermore, as indicated in Table 10.4, the government’s recurrent expenditure per student for the six types of educational institutions in Singapore has increased during 1997–2008, with the highest rate of increase for the primary schools.

In 1979, the Skills Development Fund (SDF) was established to provide incentive grants to companies for training their employees. The SDF was also concerned with the retraining of redundant workers. To finance the SDF, the PAP government imposed a skill development levy on employers with workers earning S\$750 or less a month. For example, the SDF collected

**Table 10.3.** Enrolment in Educational Institutions and Government Expenditure on Education (1960–2008).

Year	Enrolment in Educational Institutions	Government Expenditure on Education (S\$)
1960	352,952	61,403,000
1970	527,668	184,492,000
1980	501,977	686,379,000
1990	520,832	2,055,073,000
2000	634,611	5,801,033,000
2007	700,774	7,539,013,000
2008	704,117	8,246,278,000

*Sources:* Department of Statistics (1983, p. 231, Table 14.1; p. 248, Table 14.14); Department of Statistics (1996, p. 226, Table 18.1; p. 245, Table 18.24); Department of Statistics (2001, p. 234, Table 20.1; p. 249, Table 20.22); and Department of Statistics (2009, p. 246, Table 19.1; p. 258, Table 19.17).

**Table 10.4.** Government Recurrent Expenditure on Education per Student (1992, 1997, and 2008).

Institution	1992 (S\$)	1997 (S\$)	2008 (S\$)
Primary schools	2,061	2,960	5,306
Secondary schools	3,129	4,469	7,456
Junior colleges	4,780	7,052	12,066
Institute of technical education	6,201	10,586	10,834
Polytechnics	6,142	9,018	13,260
Universities	15,422	15,125	20,284

Sources: Department of Statistics (2009, p. 259, Table 19.18) and Ministry of Education (2007, p. 51, Table 31).

an annual average levy of S\$112 million during 1981–1983 (Shantakumar, 1984, p. 176).

A review of the SDF's performance in 1987 concluded that it "made training available to more employees in the company" and consequently, "more companies responded positively by stepping up their own training activities" (National Productivity Board, 1987, p. 12).

Singapore's heavy investment in education has reaped dividends. Its workforce was rated the best among the 10 newly industrialized economies (NIEs) by the International Institute for Management Development and the World Economic Forum in their *World Competitiveness Report* in 1991. The Singaporean workforce was rated the best according to these eight criteria: compulsory education, in-company training, economic literacy, professional women in the workforce, worker motivation, labor flexibility, industrial relations, and organized labor. The Business Environment Risk Intelligence (BERI) Report has also rated Singapore's workforce as the best in the world since 1980 (National Productivity Board, 1991, pp. 31–35). In 2007, Singapore's labor force was ranked by BERI as the best in the world with a rating of 88.<sup>10</sup>

Even though Singapore's educational policies are not perfect, Singapore's educational standards are very high and admired by many countries, including the United States. For example, the American Institutes for Research in Washington, D.C., wrote in its 2005 study:

Singaporean students ranked first in the world in mathematics on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study-2003; US students ranked 16th out of 46 participating nations at grade 8. ... Singaporean students [are] more successful in mathematics than their US counterparts because *Singapore has a world-class*

*mathematics system with quality components aligned to produce students who learn mathematics to mastery. . . . The US mathematics system does not have similar features.*<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the heavy investment in education has also contributed indirectly to political stability in Singapore because it has provided those citizens who are poor with scholarships or bursaries, regardless of their sex, ethnic group or religion, and enabled them to improve themselves through education. In other words, education serves as an important channel for upward social mobility in Singapore (Quah, 1991, p. 70).

### *10.3.5. Minimizing the Potential for Racial and/or Religious Conflict*

As discussed in Chapter 2, the multi-racial population and the close linkage between race and religion – most Chinese are Buddhists or Taoists, almost all Malays are Muslims, and most Indians are Hindus – indicate that the potential for racial and/or religious conflict exists in Singapore. The PAP government has met the challenge of minimizing this potential for racial and/or religious conflict in Singapore by curbing press freedom, introducing the Group Representation Constituency scheme to ensure the representation of minority groups in Parliament, initiating legislation to maintain religious harmony, and promoting the inculcation of shared values among Singaporeans. These four measures will be discussed in turn below.

#### *10.3.5.1. Curbs on Press Freedom*

As part of its nation-building program, the PAP government introduced restraints on freedom of the press in Singapore to “immunize” the heterogeneous population from succumbing to the threat of racial riots by restricting individuals, groups, organizations, and the press from sensationalizing and exploiting issues of race, language, and religion (Quah, 1988a, p. 246).

Racial riots constitute the most serious threat to Singapore’s survival because such riots can undermine the multi-racial basis of Singaporean society and also tear the social fabric apart. In a plural society like Singapore, racial riots are more likely to break out when there is lack of harmony, understanding, and tolerance between the various ethnic groups. During the past 59 years, there have been four racial riots in Singapore, such as, the Maria Hertogh riots of December 1950, the July and September 1964 racial riots, and the racial riots which resulted from the spillover effects of the 13 May 1969 racial riots in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The Maria Hertogh riots lasted for three days and resulted in 18 deaths and 173 injured persons. On 11 December 1950, rioting occurred among members of the Muslim community in Singapore over the right to the custody of Maria Huberdina Hertogh, a 13 year-old Dutch girl who was brought up for several years by an Indonesian Muslim couple in Bandung after her Catholic parents were captured by the Japanese during World War II. Several years after the war, her parents managed to locate her and regained custody of her. The Muslims in Singapore rioted because they felt that it was wrong for Maria, who had been brought up as a Muslim during the war years, to stay in a convent and to return to her parents in the Netherlands. However, the police could not quell the riots because the junior police officers sent to restore order sympathized with the rioters instead as they were mostly Malays and Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

The Maria Hertogh riots had two important consequences. First, it led to important reforms of the Singapore Police Force to rectify the weaknesses exposed by the 1951 Commission of Inquiry.<sup>13</sup> The second and more important consequence was the Commission's finding that the press coverage of the Maria Hertogh case was "a prime cause of the inflamed state of Muslim opinion immediately before the riots" (Hughes, 1980, p. 50). From 3 to 7 December 1950, both the English and Malay newspapers published photographs of Maria at the Convent of the Good Shepherd. According to Tom Hughes:

These photographs and articles, especially those of Maria surrounded by symbols of the Christian religion, had a profound effect. They were deeply resented by Muslims. To them, Maria was a Muslim and they felt she was being forced, against her wishes, to adopt the Christian faith. (Hughes, 1980, p. 51)

The unrestrained press coverage of the Maria Hertogh case and the resulting racial riots on 11 December 1950 illustrate the potential for negative consequences of a free press in a multi-racial and multi-religious society. Apart from the inability of the Malay policemen to quell the riots, the other major cause of the Maria Hertogh riots was the role of both the Malay and English newspapers in evoking strong emotions among the Muslims in Singapore through their sensational coverage of the court proceedings.

Press control in Singapore was introduced by the British colonial government with the enactment of the Printing Presses Ordinance (inherited from the 1948 Emergency Regulations) which required all printing presses to apply for an annual license to operate. The retention of this ordinance by the PAP government has resulted in the criticism that it has curbed freedom

of the press in Singapore as newspaper editors tend to exercise self-censorship in order to ensure the renewal of their annual licenses to publish their newspapers.

In May 1971, the PAP government revoked the licenses of two English newspapers, *Singapore Herald* and *Eastern Sun*, and detained four directors and journalists of the Mandarin newspaper, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, under the Internal Security Act. In 1974, the Printing Presses Ordinance was replaced by the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA), which retained government licensing of printing presses and separated editorial control from financial ownership of a newspaper by issuing management shares to Singapore citizens approved by the PAP government (Clutterbuck, 1984, pp. 341–342). On 1 September 1986, the NPPA was amended to empower the government to restrict the sale and distribution of foreign publications which interfere in Singapore's politics by "publishing material intended to generate political, ethnic, and religious unrest; indulging in slanted, distorted, or partisan reporting; or persistently refusing to publish [the] Government's replies to refute misreporting and baseless allegations" (Ministry of Communications and Information, 1987).

On 15 October 1986, the government gazetted *Time* magazine under the NPPA and reduced its circulation from 18,000 copies to 2,000 copies per issue. Similarly, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* was gazetted on 9 February 1987 under the NPPA and its circulation was reduced from 5,000 copies to 400 copies per issue. These two periodicals had interfered in Singapore's domestic affairs because they had persistently refused to publish corrections to erroneous and baseless allegations made in articles they had published (Quah 1988a, p. 247).

In his speech to the 40th World Congress of Newspaper Publishers held in Helsinki on 26 May 1987, Lee Hsien Loong, Minister for Trade and Industry, explained why it was necessary for the PAP government to take action against foreign journals and newspapers when they interfered in Singapore's domestic politics. He said:

The foreign press has no part to play in what should be a purely political press. ... if a foreign newspaper publishes biased one-sided reports and distorts its facts, and the Government is unable to compel it to acknowledge errors in its coverage, it can build up unchallenged, a skewed view of reality which will sway opinions and shape events in Singapore. This is why the Government considers refusal to publish corrections and rebuttals to be an interference in Singapore's domestic politics. ... The reason Singapore is so concerned about foreign press involvement in domestic politics is that we have seen how the media may bring in undesirable values, how newspapers can be used to carry out covert subversion, and how inflammatory reporting can lead to racial riots. (Lee, 1987, pp. 6–7)

However, Lee's explanation was ignored by *Asiaweek* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER) in their coverage of the Marxist conspiracy when 16 persons were arrested by the Internal Security Department on 21 May 1987 for their attempt to overthrow the PAP government and establish a communist state in Singapore. *Asiaweek* published a cover story on the Marxist plot in its 13 September 1987 issue. The Press Secretary to the Minister for Home Affairs wrote to *Asiaweek* to correct errors and distortions in the article. The editor published an edited version of his letter and refused to publish the letter in full. On 11 October 1987, the government restricted *Asiaweek's* circulation from 10,000 copies to 500 copies per issue (Quah, 1988a, p. 247).

Like *Asiaweek*, the FEER had also published articles on the Marxist conspiracy, which led to an exchange of correspondence between the Prime Minister's Press Secretary and the FEER's editor. Unlike *Asiaweek*, the FEER published the Singapore government's rebuttals to its articles as its strategy was "to publish the Singapore Government's corrections and rebuttals and resurrect points already disposed of."<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the FEER's circulation was restricted from 29 December 1987 from 9,000 copies to 500 copies per issue for publishing "a totally distorted account" of the 2 June 1987 meeting between the Prime Minister and representatives of the Catholic Church in Singapore (Quah, 1988a, p. 248).

#### 10.3.5.2. Group Representation Constituency Scheme

The Group Representation Constituency (GRC) scheme was introduced in 1988 to ensure the continued representation of minority groups in Parliament as each GRC is represented by a team consisting of three to six members, one of whom must be a member of a minority group. The introduction of the GRC scheme in the September 1988 general election resulted in the increase of electoral constituencies to 81, with 42 single member constituencies (SMCs) and 13 GRCs of 3 members each (Quah, 1991b). The size and number of GRCs have been increased in subsequent general elections as there are now 9 SMCs and 14 GRCs (nine GRCs with 5 members and five GRCs with 6 members).<sup>15</sup>

In his dialogue session on the national agenda with the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union on 11 April 1987, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, posed this question to his audience:

How do we ensure that all the major races are involved in the Government of Singapore? To be specific, how do we ensure that all the major races will be adequately represented in Parliament and in the Cabinet? ... How do we ensure ... that Parliament will always have multiracial representation? (Goh, 1987, pp. 9–10)

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew answered Goh's question four months later during his National Day Rally speech on 16 August when he suggested that "the Team MPs proposal would be a way of ensuring continued representation on minority races, particularly the Malays, in Parliament."<sup>16</sup>

Table 10.5 shows that there are three patterns of representation in Singapore's legislature. First, the Chinese were under-represented in the legislature from 1959 to 1980. They were over-represented for the first time by three MPs after the 1984 general election. The second pattern of over-representation can be observed for the Indians and Eurasians. The Indians were over-represented in the legislature for the entire period except for 1972 and 1976, when they were adequately represented in Parliament. In contrast, the Eurasians were over-represented in the legislature from 1959 to 1980 and only under-represented for the first time in Parliament by one MP in 1984. The third pattern of mixed representation is demonstrated by the Malays who were over-represented by three Legislative Assemblymen in 1959. They were adequately represented in Parliament in 1963 and 1968. However, from 1972 to 1984, the Malays have been under-represented in Parliament (Quah, 1988a, p. 236).

On 30 November 1987, Goh Chok Tong introduced the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment No. 2) Bill and the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill in Parliament to provide for the creation of GRCs. He contended that the GRC scheme "will institutionalize the practice of multi-racial politics in Singapore, a necessary condition for political stability in multi-racial Singapore."<sup>17</sup>

**Table 10.5.** Representation in the Singapore Legislature by Ethnic Group (1959–1984).

Year	Chinese	Malays	Indians	Eurasians
1959	-6	+3	+2	+1
1963	-4	0	+2	+2
1968	-3	0	+1	+2
1972	-1	-2	0	+3
1976	-1	-1	0	+2
1980	-1	-2	+2	+1
1984	+3	-3	+1	-1
Mean	-2	-1	+1	+1

*Note:* A negative sign indicates that the ethnic group is under-represented in the legislature. A positive sign indicates that the ethnic group is over-represented in the legislature. "0" indicates that the percentage of the ethnic group in the legislature is the same as that in the population.

*Source:* Quah (1988a, p. 236, Table 1).

#### *10.3.5.3. Maintenance of Religious Harmony*

In his opening address in Parliament on 19 January 1989, President Wee Kim Wee stressed the need for religious tolerance and moderation in Singapore's multi-religious society. He also reminded religious groups to observe the taboo of non-involvement in the political process because "in a multi-religious society, if one group violates this taboo, others will follow suit, and the outcome will be militancy and conflict."<sup>18</sup>

On 26 December 1989, the White Paper on *Maintenance of Religious Harmony* was presented to Parliament. The White Paper included in its annex a report on "Religious Trends – A Security Perspective" prepared by the Internal Security Department to "illustrate actual instances" of aggressive and insensitive proselytization, mixing of religion and politics, and religious activists exploiting religion for subversive purposes.<sup>19</sup> To maintain religious harmony, the White Paper argued that "followers of the different religions must exercise moderation and tolerance, and do nothing to cause religious enmity or hatred" and "religion and politics must be kept rigorously separated."<sup>20</sup>

As religious leaders and their followers should not promote any political party or cause "under the cloak of religion," the aim of separating religion from politics is "to establish working rules by which many faiths can accept fundamental differences between them, and coexist peacefully in Singapore."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the government introduced legislation which enables the Minister for Home Affairs to issue a prohibition order against those who threaten racial harmony because of their harmful conduct by preventing them from engaging in these activities: addressing congregations; printing, publishing, distributing, or contributing to any publication produced by that religious group; and holding office in any editorial board or committee of any publication produced by that group.<sup>22</sup>

The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill was introduced in Parliament for its first reading on 15 January 1990. It was read a second time on 22 February 1990 and was sent to a Select Committee two days later. The Select Committee received written representations from 78 persons and organizations. It proposed 18 amendments to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill, which was passed in Parliament on 9 November 1990 (Quah, 1992).

#### *10.3.5.4. Shared Values*

The origins of the concept of shared values can be traced to Goh Chok Tong's speech to the PAP Youth Wing on 28 October 1988, when he first suggested the need for Singapore to have a national ideology "to immunize Singaporeans from the undesirable effects of alien influences and to bind

them together as a nation” (Goh, 1988, pp. 14–15). On 9 January 1990, President Wee Kim Wee explained why Singapore needed a national ideology in his opening address at the Seventh Parliament:

If we are not to lose our bearings, we should preserve the cultural heritage of each of our communities, and uphold certain common values which capture the essence of being a Singaporean. These core values include placing society above self, upholding the family as the basic block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention, and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony.<sup>23</sup>

On 21 January 1989, Goh Chok Tong announced that a discussion paper on shared values would be presented to Parliament. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) formed a Study Group on National Values at the request of the government to conduct a study to identify those national values which would help to unite all Singaporeans. The IPS Study Group completed its study within 10 months and its report was published as a monograph entitled *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, in September 1990.

The IPS Study Group recommended that the government adopt these six values, in descending order of importance, as national values for all Singaporeans:

1. Enhancing racial and religious understanding, tolerance, and harmony.
2. Preserving and maintaining the tradition of honest government.
3. Harmonizing individual interests with the interests of the community at large.
4. Upholding the family as a basic institution of society.
5. Showing compassion for the less fortunate in society.
6. Resolving major issues through consensus as far as possible (Quah, 1990, pp. 102–103).

On 3 January 1991, the government presented a White Paper on *Shared Values* in Parliament after taking into account the extensive discussion on the topic both within and outside Parliament since President Wee's identification of the four core values in January 1989. The White Paper identified these five shared values, which are extensions and modifications of the original four core values:

1. Nation before community and society above self.
2. Family as the basic unit of society.
3. Regard and community support for the individual.
4. Consensus instead of contention.
5. Racial and religious harmony.<sup>24</sup>

The White Paper on *Shared Values* was debated in Parliament on 14–15 January 1991 and it was adopted with two amendments. First, the third value of “Regard and community support for the individual” was changed to “Community support and respect for the individual.” The second amendment concerned the fourth value of “Consensus instead of contention,” which was revised to “Consensus, not conflict.”<sup>25</sup>

### *10.3.6. Preventing Internal Subversion by Relying on the Internal Security Act*

To prevent internal subversion, the government has employed the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Ordinance (CLTPO) to detain without trial those persons who are involved in subversive or communist-related activities, drug traffickers, and criminals. The origins of the ISA can be traced to the Emergency Regulations introduced by the British in Malaya and Singapore in 1948 to deal with the communists, terrorists, and subversives as well as racial and religious extremists. In 1955, the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance (PPSO) replaced the Emergency Regulations. The PPSO was replaced by the ISA in 1963 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2002, p. 17).

The ISA enables the PAP government to stop illegal groups that endanger Singapore’s internal security from forming and growing. It is implemented by the Internal Security Department (ISD), which ensures Singapore’s safety and security by countering such security threats to the nation’s internal stability as “international terrorism, foreign subversion, espionage, and acts of violence or hatred using race or religion (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2002, p. 15).” The ISD has dealt effectively with these three phases of communist subversion in Singapore:

1. *1950s and 1960s.* Mobilization of students and workers by the communists against the British colonial government and the PAP government.
2. *May 1976.* Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) began recruiting all Singaporeans, including those with a middle-class background, to overthrow the PAP government by force.
3. *May 1987.* The ISD arrested 16 persons for their involvement in a Marxist conspiracy to overthrow the PAP government and establish a communist state in Singapore. Unlike the poor Chinese-educated CPM cadres in the 1950s and 1960s, the 16 persons arrested were comfortably well-off English-educated graduates and professionals (Quah, 1988a, p. 244).

The CPM's cultivation and infiltration of Christian groups and the ISD's investigation into the activities of some Christian churches and mosques led to the Ministry of Community Development's 1988 study on religion<sup>26</sup> and the enactment of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in 1990.

The threat of terrorism in Singapore has been enhanced by the 11 September 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City. In December 2001, the ISD arrested 15 members of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) for plotting attacks against American and Western targets in Singapore. In August 2002, the ISD arrested another 21 persons for terrorist-related activities. In January 2003, the PAP government issued a White Paper on *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* to provide details of the JI network in Southeast Asia and Singapore and explain why their members were arrested. It also suggested some measures for countering the JI threat.

The lesson to learn from the above incidents is the need for the ISD to be continually vigilant as a preventive measure to nip in the bud any attempts by the communists, communalists, religious extremists, or terrorists to create unrest in Singapore.

### *10.3.7. Learning from Other Countries' Experiences to Solve Problems*

In his comparative study of health care policy in Germany, Japan, Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom, Howard M. Leichter astutely observed that:

Rarely do policy makers embark upon entirely new courses of action; rather, they borrow heavily from an apparently finite, existing repertoire of policy solutions. There is a tendency for policy makers, when faced with a particular problem, to look for an analogous situation in another system and to emulate the solutions used by others. (Leichter, 1979, p. 65)

Leichter refers to the "emulation and borrowing of policy ideas and solutions from other nations" as policy diffusion (Leichter, 1979, p. 42).

Instead of "reinventing the wheel," the PAP leaders and senior civil servants will examine what has been done elsewhere to identify relevant solutions for policy problems in Singapore. The policies selected will usually be modified to suit the Singapore context. For example, the government has examined the Japanese and French civil services and the Shell system of performance appraisal (discussed in Chapter 5) as part of its efforts to improve personnel management in the SCS.

Stella Quah has identified pragmatic acculturation as a common feature of the cultural milieus of Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan (Quah, 1995c, p. 287). Pragmatic acculturation refers to

the cultural system of behavior and attitudes that allows culture-borrowing or the adoption of aspects of non-native cultures for the purpose of satisfying specific needs. (Quah, 1995c, p. 288)

According to her, "Singaporeans are well versed in the art of culture-borrowing, as Singaporeans of all races (Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians, and others) have been learning and borrowing cultural elements from each other for nearly two centuries" (Quah, 1995c, p. 289). Furthermore, as Singapore is a small island, "it is sensible and imperative to learn from other countries far and near" (Quah, 1995c, p. 289). Consequently, it is not surprising that policy makers in Singapore are inclined "to learn from the successes and failures of other countries and then apply the lessons to Singapore" (Quah, 1995c, p. 291).

The process of pragmatic acculturation involves these three steps:

1. After identifying the problem to be solved or the goal to be attained, a team of Singapore experts and officials go on a fact-finding tour of relevant technical centers and organizations around the world to learn how the same or similar problems have been solved.
2. Internationally recognized experts are invited to Singapore to give their professional opinion.
3. The final policy plan is the outcome of ideas selected from what has been learned on the problem, tailored to the specific needs of Singapore. If ideas and procedures used elsewhere are deemed to be unsuitable to the needs of Singapore, none of them are taken (Quah, 1995c, p. 290).

Employing the above process, the PAP leaders initially looked toward small countries like Israel and Switzerland as role models for defense and other areas after independence. Later, other countries like Germany (for technical education), the Netherlands (Schiphol airport was the model for Changi airport), Japan (for quality control circles and crime prevention), Sweden (for family-friendly policies), and Russia and the United States (for gifted education) were added to the list.

In sum, policy diffusion remains a useful strategy for the PAP government as long as there is no blind acceptance and wholesale transplantation of foreign innovations without modification to suit the local environment.

### *10.3.8. Rejecting the Idea of the Welfare State*

An important advantage of being a young nation is to learn from the mistakes made by other countries by not repeating the same errors. The best example of this is the PAP government's decision to reject the welfare state in view of the many problems afflicting those developed countries that had adopted welfare policies. In June 1976, Goh Keng Swee, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defense, rejected the adoption of welfare state policies in Singapore because of their negative consequences:

But nothing is for free in this world and the end result of indiscriminate welfare state policies is bankruptcy. . . . In several West European countries, unemployment benefits have been so generous that some workers are better off unemployed! The money to pay for welfare state expenditure must come either from taxes or from the printing press. Increasing taxes, which mainly affects the rich, reduces the amount of money available for investment, thereby slowing down economic growth. Printing paper money to avoid unpleasant tax increases merely results in more inflation. (Goh, 1977, p. 166)

The PAP leaders view social welfare as a consumption good and are concerned that "government provision of social welfare" might lead to "an unhealthy dependence on the state and sap individual initiative and enterprise, thereby also undermining growth." Indeed, China, Jamaica, and Sri Lanka had abandoned their "welfarist" policies as their governments found that "guaranteed social welfare" was expensive and inappropriate (Lim, 1989, p. 172). Learning from the experiences of these countries, the PAP government "has never committed significant government funds to social security for the unemployed, disabled, aged, or indigent" (Lim, 1989, pp. 186–187). This is reflected in the significant decrease in the transfer payments to households as a percentage of main government expenditure from 12.8 percent in 1960 to 1.4 percent in 1975 (Lim, 1989, p. 187).

As the PAP leaders are philosophically averse to subsidies and concerned with the "magnitude of public welfare commitments in Western countries," it is not surprising that they have imposed stringent criteria for awarding public assistance. Thus, "nearly 90 percent of its recipients are single, elderly persons, most of the immigrants who have spent a lifetime at hard labor, never married, and have no family ties, with the remainder being the mentally or physically handicapped, widows and orphans, and abandoned wives and children" (Lim, 1989, p. 187). Table 10.6 shows that 87 percent of the recipients of public assistance in Singapore from 1986 to 1996 are the aged destitutes. Furthermore, the public assistance provided is meager, and there is no system of unemployment compensation. In short, the PAP government's policy is, in the words of former Senior Minister S.

**Table 10.6.** Number of Public Assistance Recipients in Singapore (1986–1996).

Category	1986	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
Aged destitutes	2,736	2,030	1,954	1,915	1,852	1,695	1,701	13,883 (87%)
Medically unfit	79	89	90	87	76	86	106	613 (3.8%)
Wives and orphans	53	75	70	73	61	57	58	447 (2.8%)
Handicapped and disabled	155	95	102	104	101	98	115	770 (4.8%)
Widows with young children	52	43	39	41	42	22	22	261 (1.6%)
Total	3,075	2,332	2,255	2,220	2,132	1,958	2,002	15,974 (100%)

Source: Adapted from Low and Ngiam (1999, p. 236, Table 11.1).

Rajaratnam, “to reduce welfare to the minimum” and to restrict it “only to those who are handicapped or old” (Lim, 1989, p. 187).

Instead of providing social welfare to Singaporeans, the PAP government relies on the Central Provident Fund (CPF) to provide social security for the population. The CPF was employed for this purpose for two reasons: the government could not afford welfare as there were other more urgent priorities; and the concept of “pay-as-you-earn” was ideologically appealing. In other words, the reliance on the CPF enables the PAP government to provide limited social security for the population without becoming a welfare state.

In her analysis of the CPF’s changing role from 1955 to 1990, Irene Ng has observed that the CPF’s changing role does not “represent a change in the government’s philosophy or direction” as the CPF is still viewed as “a national nest-egg” for workers to rely on when they retire. The PAP government believes that Singapore should not be a welfare state because of the “abuses and wastage” and the “erosion of individual responsibility” in many welfare states (Ng, 1991, p. 70). Accordingly, Singapore’s model of social assistance assumes that government help should be provided as the last resort because people are expected to “exhaust their resources, those of their families, and those of the community, before turning to the Government for help” (Lim, 2007, p. 36).

However, Singapore’s rejection of the welfare state has been criticized because this policy has resulted in social security programs which are characterized by “low funding, fragmentation, incomplete coverage and heavy dependence upon inequitable policy instruments” (Lee, 1998b, p. 300). William K.M. Lee has contended that poverty among the elderly

in Singapore will increase because they are not adequately protected by the existing social security programs (Lee, 1998b, p. 304). In 1998, he had predicted that elderly women and elderly Malays would be the most disadvantaged groups with the aging of the population:

the incidence of poverty has declined quite dramatically since the mid-1950s, but there remains a modest but significant number of households still living in poverty. With Singapore's population aging, the poor will increasingly include those elderly who are either not covered or inadequately protected by the CPF and those who do not have adequate financial retirement resources and family support. In the next two decades, it appears that elderly women and the elderly from the Malay community are likely to suffer greater financial insecurity. (Lee, 1998b, p. 299)

In short, the rejection of the welfare state and the reliance on the CPF to provide limited social security and a source of development funds have enabled Singapore to avoid the excesses and problems afflicting the welfare states as well as attract foreign investment and talent because of the low taxes levied on multi-national corporations and professionals. However, this policy has also resulted in inadequate financial protection for the poor and elderly.

Consequently, it is not surprising that Table 10.7 shows that Singapore is ranked eighth on the Melbourne Mercer Global Pension Index 2009 after the Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, Canada, Britain, United States, and Chile. Among the 11 countries ranked, only Germany, China, and Japan were ranked behind Singapore. Singapore's score of 57 was below the Netherlands' top score of 76.1 and the average score of 61.4 (Tan, 2009, p. C22).

**Table 10.7.** Melbourne Mercer Global Pension Index 2009.

Country	Overall Index Value
1. Netherlands	76.1
2. Australia	74.0
3. Sweden	73.5
4. Canada	73.2
5. Britain	63.9
6. United States	59.8
7. Chile	59.6
8. Singapore	57.0
9. Germany	48.2
10. China	48.0
11. Japan	41.5
Average score	61.4

Source: Tan (2009, p. C22).

### *10.3.9. Adopting a Proactive and Interventionist Leadership Style*

The PAP leaders have adopted a proactive style of leadership. This means that they are not reactive as they anticipate what problems will arise and initiate pre-emptive measures to prevent these problems from emerging. For example, as discussed earlier, the GRC scheme was introduced in 1988 to prevent the emergence of a non-multi-racial parliament. Similarly, the elected president was created in 1991 to prevent the prime minister from making a unilateral decision on the use of Singapore's foreign reserves (Quah, 1989b, pp. 17–18).

As discussed earlier, Lee Kuan Yew adopted a paternalistic or authoritarian style of leadership during his 31 years as prime minister (May 1959–October 1990). He had relied on national campaigns as an instrument for policy implementation and also to change both the attitudes and behavior of Singaporeans. In August 1986, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew justified his interventionist style thus:

I am accused often of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn't be here today.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, according to him, Singapore's success can be attributed to the implementation of unpopular policies which have often interfered with the private lives of Singaporeans, but which have contributed to the city-state's political stability and economic growth. In short, without government intervention, Singapore's success would not have been possible (Quah & Quah, 1989, p. 102).

In his study of national campaigns in Singapore, Tham Kok Wing found that 66 national campaigns were conducted from 1958 to 1982 (Tham, 1983, pp. 92–94). During the first phase (1958–1967), the 31 campaigns were political in nature as they were used openly as platforms for initiating and sustaining efforts toward political ends as manifested in the Learn Malay Drive (July 1959), National Language Week (March 1962, August 1964, August and November 1965), and the Campaign for Merger with Malaysia (Tham, 1983, p. 18).

During 1968–1978, as the PAP government was more concerned with defense and economic survival, the number of campaigns was reduced to 16 and focused on social, environmental, and health issues. Penalties and disincentives were introduced for non-conformity (as in the Keep Singapore Clean campaigns) and campaigns were usually backed by legislation to ensure compliance with the new rules. Finally, the campaigns conducted from 1979 onwards were coordinated and planned by the Prime Minister's

Office and some campaigns (Speak Mandarin and Courtesy campaigns) were conducted annually as “social habits and ingrained practices require time and sustained effort to modify” (Quah, 1984c, p. 304).

In her comparative analysis of the role of the state in Singapore and Hong Kong, Stella Quah has described their contrasting roles thus:

The British colonial government played the role of *referee* in Hong Kong’s socio-economic development. In contrast, the Singapore government plays the role of *coach* in the task of creating the global city and more importantly, in bringing the nation to a developed country status. As referee, the British colonial government sought to ensure that the rules of the game are played fairly while giving the population as much latitude as possible to build up the colony’s wealth. . . . The Singapore government plays the role of coach as it sets up necessary infrastructure and fiscal incentives to attract foreign investment, strives to shape ‘Singapore Incorporated’, and prevails upon the citizens to join in the enterprise, as team members, for their own benefit. (Quah, 1997, p. 308)

After comparing the two city-states’ contrasting approaches in the provision of public housing, education, manpower planning, labor relations, and nation-building, she concluded that:

The contrasting situation of Hong Kong and Singapore confirms that a colonial government may have a weaker interest in facilitating that wish [of having a stake in their country] for their subjects than the elected government of an independent nation-state. Other significant aspects of the socio-cultural dimension include education and manpower planning, labor relations, defense and nation-building. Hong Kong and Singapore differ greatly in these aspects and their analysis provides further evidence of the Hong Kong government’s role as referee and of the role of coach of the Singapore government. (Quah, 1997, p. 312)

The shift toward a consultative style of leadership began in March 1985 with the establishment of the Feedback Unit, which was formed as a result of the 12.6 percent decline in votes for the PAP during the December 1984 general election. The trend toward a more consultative style of leadership was reinforced during 1988 with the discussion of the GRC bill by members of the public who expressed their views to the Select Committee and by the establishment of the Institute of Policy Studies and six Advisory Councils (Quah, 1989b, p. 2). The consultative style of leadership was consolidated during Goh Chok Tong’s term as Singapore’s second prime minister from November 1990 to August 2004,<sup>28</sup> and has been continued by Lee Hsien Loong, who became Singapore’s third prime minister in August 2004.

Box 10.3 provides a summary of the preceding analysis of the PAP government’s philosophy of governance in terms of the policy constraints, assumptions of human nature, strategies for intervention, and its objectives.

**Box 10.3. The PAP Government's Philosophy of Governance**

<b>Constraints</b>	<b>Strategies for Intervention</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
City-state with small population Multi-racial population No natural resources Reliance on foreign investment Narrow margin for failure	Meeting population's basic needs Maintaining meritocracy Minimizing corruption Investing in education Minimizing racial and religious conflict Preventing internal subversion Learning from other countries Rejecting the welfare state Adopting proactive and interventionist leadership style	Enable citizens to attain the "good life" by maintaining political stability and maximizing economic growth
<b>Assumptions of human nature</b> Elitist and negative views of human nature		

#### 10.4. IS SINGAPORE'S PRICE OF SUCCESS TOO HIGH?

Singapore's transformation from a third world country in 1959 to a first world country today has generated a great deal of international interest in Singapore's model of development. Indeed, many political leaders and senior civil servants have visited Singapore to identify the reasons for its success and to draw lessons for their own countries.<sup>29</sup> For example, Deng Xiaoping visited Singapore for the first time in 1978 and was so impressed that "he wanted to use the Lion City as a model." His call to learn from Singapore resulted in 400 delegations of Chinese mayors, governors, and party secretaries visiting Singapore during the same year on study missions.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in November 1993, 17 leaders from 10 African countries attended the conference on "The Relevance of Singapore's Experience for Africa" in Singapore (Singapore International Foundation, 1994, p. vii). The number of foreign leaders visiting Singapore increased from 48 in 1990 to 231 in 1993 (Quah, 1998, p. 119).

On the other hand, Singapore's success has also generated criticism from some critics. For example, some writers have criticized the PAP government's "unwritten social contract: soft authoritarianism in exchange for economic prosperity" (Genzberger, 1994, p. 17) as this means that if there is no economic growth, Singaporeans might no longer accept or adhere to this unwritten social contract if they no longer benefit from a system that requires them to sacrifice some of their personal freedoms. These critics argue that Singaporeans have paid too high a price by sacrificing their personal freedoms for economic growth. Richard Clutterbuck has observed that Singapore's critics contend that Singapore's economic success has been "achieved by unacceptable erosion of civil liberties, by negation of parliamentary and trade union opposition, by detention without trial and by surreptitious denial of freedom of speech and freedom of the press" (Clutterbuck, 1984, p. 319).

Clutterbuck begins his chapter on "The Price of Success" by asking this question: "Is the Price too High?" (Clutterbuck, 1984, p. 337). He contends that in spite of the ISA and the controls on the press and trade unions, Singapore remains a parliamentary democracy and not a one-party state because "25 percent [of the population] can and do vote against the PAP but the great majority have consistently voted, freely and fairly, to have a PAP government . . . and the people *do* retain the power and opportunity, every five years at least, to dismiss the Government by secret ballot if they so wish" (Clutterbuck, 1984, pp. 347-348).

In the same vein, Bryan Caplan rejects the criticism that Singapore is “a thinly-veiled dictatorship” for three reasons: the many legal opposition parties “hardly live in mortal fear of the PAP; the restrictions on political expression “shield people from criticism, not policies”; and elections are “free from irregularities and vote rigging” (Caplan, 2009, pp. 66–67). Even though the PAP government has been in power for 50 years, it is still perceived as the third least corrupt country among the 180 countries included in Transparency International’s 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index with a score of 9.2 out of the maximum score of 10.

However, Clutterbuck has also expressed concern about the consequences of authoritarian rule by an incompetent leader thus:

The authoritarian powers which the PAP has used its dominance to enact have been important in the achievement and continuance thus far of its economic success and social order. These same powers could, however, be an Achilles heel if they were to fall into the hands of a leader who was stupid, evil, arrogant or feckless. (Clutterbuck, 1984, p. 353)

Furthermore, Clutterbuck has argued that the PAP government should relax some of the provisions of the ISA and NPPA before they “become too deeply ingrained.” Lee Kuan Yew had argued in 1956 that Britain had no violent revolutions for more than 300 years because it had allowed all political parties to compete freely for power, including the communists. Accordingly, Clutterbuck contends that Lee’s argument can also be used to make a case for “a relaxation of some of the restraints which were necessary in the 1960s, but no longer needed in the 1980s” as Singapore is “one of the most stable and best governed democracies in the world” (Clutterbuck, 1984, p. 353).

In assessing whether the price of Singapore’s success is too high, it is obviously better for Singapore to pay the price of success than the price of failure, which has been paid by many countries. In his book, *Preparing for the 21st Century*, Paul Kennedy wrote:

Clearly, a society which desires to be better prepared for the twenty-first century will pay a price to achieve that transition; it will need to retool its national skills and infrastructure, challenge vested interests, alter many old habits, and perhaps amend its governmental structures. But this assumes long-term vision at a time when most politicians – in both rich and poor countries – can hardly deal with even short-term problems; and it means political risk, since many of the reforms proposed would be unpopular among vested interests. Alongside voices calling for change there exist large constituencies wanting things to stay as they are, to freeze things rather than respond. (Kennedy, 1993, pp. 344–345)

Thus, Singapore's political leaders, civil servants and population have decided to pay the price of success instead of paying the exorbitant price of failure. In short, it is better to pay the price of success than the price of failure. Susan E. Rice and Stewart Patrick of the Brookings Institution have developed an Index of State Weakness by ranking 141 developing countries according to 20 indicators.<sup>31</sup> Based on their analysis, Rice and Patrick have identified the eight weakest states in descending order as Somalia, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Burundi, Sudan, Central African Republic, and Zimbabwe (Rice & Patrick, 2008, p. 10). These eight countries are failed states as they are poorly governed and afflicted by rampant corruption because their governments lack the political will to enforce impartially the anti-corruption laws (Quah, 2009c, pp. 128–129).

K. Shanmugam, the Minister for Law and Second Minister for Home Affairs, explained to the participants attending the New York State Bar Association Rule of Law Plenary Session in Singapore on 28 October 2009 that Singapore's progress could be attributed to these four fundamental factors: "rule of law, stability, security from external threats, and a high quality public service".<sup>32</sup> He concluded that "our approach works for us and enjoys broad public support" as Singapore has a low crime rate of 684 per 100,000 population (compared to New York's crime rate of 2,400 per 100,000) and "our per capita GDP has grown from US\$500 in 1965 to US\$51,500 [*sic*] now" and there are "no disappearances, shootings on the roads, coups, juntas, muggings and so on" (Shanmugam, 2009, pp. 8–9).

He ended his speech by responding to criticisms of Singapore's approach to law enforcement thus:

Over the years, we have faced various criticisms. We have looked at them and worked on those which were sensible. We ignored the rest. Increasingly, as we have progressed and as we have become more successful, we also realize that some of those who offer us prescriptions and criticisms are not able to see the issues in their own system; assume that the values of our society are exactly the same as theirs; and sometimes do not understand the need for a different approach, in a different society, in a different climate. (Shanmugam, 2009, p. 9)

Finally, while the PAP government has been effective, it is not perfect as not all Singaporeans have benefited from its rule. During the last four general elections in 1991, 1997, 2001, and 2006, between 25 and 39 percent of the voters voted for the opposition political parties. Perhaps the group that has benefited the least is the bottom 10 percent income earners, who have become poorer in recent years in spite of Singapore's affluence and economic progress. In 1997, there were 340,000 Singaporeans (11 percent of the population) who earned below S\$500 (US\$299) a month. Table 10.6

above shows that the number of public assistance recipients has declined from 3,075 in 1986 to 2,002 in 1996.

Table 10.8 shows that while the average monthly household income has increased from S\$4,360 to S\$6,830 during 1995–2007, the increase for the bottom 10 percent was only S\$140 compared to the increase of S\$7,133 for the top 10 percent. In other words, the increase in the average monthly household income for the top 10 percent was 51 times that of the bottom 10 percent. According to Yeoh Lam Keong, the “poor and least skilled” in Singapore are the “hardest hit” because “median monthly starting pay for cleaners and laborers has fallen by nearly a third, from S\$860 to S\$600, between 1996 and 2006” (Yeoh, 2007, p. 8). The poorest decile, consisting of 90,000 to 100,000 households, earn only S\$160 per month per capita or S\$640 a month for a family of four (Yeoh, 2007, p. 9). As “hardship has been a way of life for over a decade” for these families, he has recommended the formulation of a new social compact for Singapore because “with Singapore’s per capita income at around US\$31,000, it is undesirable that the bottom 10 percent of Singapore households still struggle to meet basic needs and have little means to invest in their family’s betterment” (Yeoh, 2007, pp. 9, 11).

Consequently, the PAP government announced in 2007 a Goods and Service Tax (GST) offset package to help the lower-income Singaporeans cope with the increase in GST from 5 percent to 7 percent in July 2007. This

**Table 10.8.** Average Monthly Household Income from Work in Singapore (1995–2007).

Category (%)	1995 (S\$)	2007 (S\$)	Change (S\$)
1–10	1,070	1,210	+140
11–20	1,720	2,220	+500
21–30	2,240	3,040	+800
31–40	2,780	3,920	+1,140
41–50	3,330	4,880	+1,550
51–60	3,940	5,840	+1,900
61–70	4,670	7,080	+2,410
71–80	5,640	8,720	+3,080
81–90	6,990	11,190	+4,200
91–100	11,190	20,240	+7,133
Total	4,360	6,830	+2,470

Source: Department of Statistics (2008, p. 10, Annex A, Table A2). See <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/papers/people/op-s14.pdf>

offset package provided, on average, a total of S\$400 to S\$460 per person to the lowest 20 percent of the resident households and S\$180 to S\$230 per person to the top 20 percent of households.<sup>33</sup> The cost of the offset package from 2007 to 2011 would cost S\$550 million. For 2009, more than 780,000 HDB households received utility rebates in January and July amounting to S\$125 million (Lim, 2008, p. A3).

In conclusion, the nine strategies for intervention employed by the PAP government have maintained political stability, maximized economic growth and enabled many Singaporeans to attain the “good life”. However, some Singaporeans, especially those from the low-income households have not benefited as much from Singapore’s economic affluence and need help from the government to enable them to cope with the rising cost of living and the economic recession in recent years.

## NOTES

1. According to his deputy, I.F. Tang, Winsemius was originally not keen to accept the Singapore assignment as he had heard that Singapore would become communist and he “did not want to be associated with a losing proposition.” However, he accepted the assignment on the condition that Tang would be part of the team. See Tang (2002, pp. 18–19).

2. Quoted in Drysdale (1984, p. 252).

3. Some Singaporeans have added the 6th ‘C’ of country club membership.

4. See also J. Cheam (2009), S’pore dream: Back to basics. *Straits Times*, 10 January, p. C21.

5. See Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), quoted in Schein (2004, pp. 171–172).

6. See <http://agcvldb4.agc.gov.sg>

7. For an excellent analysis of the various incentives and disincentives for family planning and the pro-natality policies after 1987, see Saw (2005, Chapters 6, 12 and 13).

8. See [http://www.edb.gov.sg/edb/sg/en\\_uk/index/why\\_singapore/singapore\\_rankings.htm](http://www.edb.gov.sg/edb/sg/en_uk/index/why_singapore/singapore_rankings.htm) for “Singapore Rankings.”

9. *Straits Times* (28 April 1971, p. 3), quoted in Bellows (1989, p. 206).

10. *BERI’s 2007 Labor Force Evaluation Measure (LFEM) Report*, quoted in “Singapore Rankings” at [http://www.sedb.com/edb/sg/en\\_uk/index/why\\_singapore/singapore\\_rankings.html](http://www.sedb.com/edb/sg/en_uk/index/why_singapore/singapore_rankings.html)

11. Ginsburg, Leinwand, Anstrom, and Pollock (2005, p. ix). The online version of this report is available at [http://www.air.org/news/documents/Singapore%20Report%20\(Bookmark%20Version\).pdf](http://www.air.org/news/documents/Singapore%20Report%20(Bookmark%20Version).pdf)

12. For more details of the Maria Hertogh riots, see Aljunied (2009), Marican (1973), Hughes (1980), and Maideen (2000).

13. For details, see Quah (1985a, p. 194).

14. “Attempt to Pit Catholic Church against the Government,” *Sunday Times*, 27 December 1987, p. 3.

15. See [http://www.elections.gov.sg/types\\_electoral.htm](http://www.elections.gov.sg/types_electoral.htm), accessed on 25 September 2009. There are now 84 electoral constituencies.

16. "Team MPs Proposal can ensure a Continued Multi-Racial Parliament," *Straits Times*, 17 August 1987, p. 14. The GRC scheme was originally referred to as the Team MPs proposal.

17. "Team MPs for Next Election," *Straits Times*, 1 December 1987, p. 1.

18. *Maintenance of Religious Harmony*, Command 21 of 1989 (Presented to Parliament by Command of the President of the Republic of Singapore, 26 December 1989), p. 1, paragraph 2.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–19.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 4, paragraph 14.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 7, paragraph 27.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 10, paragraph 38.

23. *Straits Times*, 10 January 1989, p. 12.

24. *Shared Values*, Command 1 of 1991 (Presented to Parliament by Command of the President of the Republic of Singapore, 2 January 1991), p. 10, paragraph 52.

25. *Straits Times*, 16 January 1991, p. 1.

26. See Kuo, Quah and Tong (1988).

27. *Straits Times*, 18 August 1986, p. 1.

28. See Quah (2009d, pp. 50–53).

29. Quah (1998, p. 119). See also "Selling Success: Singapore has found its most attractive export yet – itself," *Asiaweek*, Vol. 20, No. 28, 13 July 1994, pp. 24–27.

30. Kristof (1992, p. 4), quoted in Pease (1996, p. 1).

31. Rice and Patrick (2008). This report is available at [http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/02\\_weak\\_states\\_index/02\\_weak\\_states\\_index.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/02_weak_states_index/02_weak_states_index.pdf)

32. Shanmugam (2009, p. 2). The text of this speech is available at <http://app2.mlaw.gov.sg/News/tabid/204/Default.aspx?ItemId = 444>, accessed on 14 November 2009.

33. Department of Statistics (2008, p. 5). See <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/papers/people/op-s14.pdf>, accessed on 31 August 2009.



# CHAPTER 11

## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SINGAPORE-STYLE

The nature of a particular bureaucracy is linked to the system of government and the society in which it operates . . . Bureaucratic models are not packages ready for export or import; they provide illustrations of options and styles for consideration in their separate parts, and for adaptation before acceptance in a different context.

– Sayre (1967, p. 354)

Wallace S. Sayre’s astute observation about the relationship between bureaucracy and its policy context applies to the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) as its evolution and functioning have been influenced by both the policies introduced by the People’s Action Party (PAP) government and the constraints imposed by the local context. Chapter 2 has described the various changes in Singapore’s policy context and how these changes have contributed positively to the implementation of public policies and the SCS’s effectiveness. Sayre’s warning that bureaucratic models should not be imported without adaptation should be heeded in assessing whether public administration Singapore-style is transferable to other Asian countries.

The SCS and statutory boards have played an important and effective role in national development in Singapore during the past 50 years under the PAP government. This fact is confirmed by referring to the World Bank’s governance indicators on government effectiveness and control of corruption from 1996 to 2008. Four other indicators are also used to verify the public bureaucracy’s effectiveness in Singapore: Singapore’s ranking and score on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index; Singapore’s ranking on public sector competence and the public trust in politicians’ honesty in the *Global Competitiveness Report*; and Singapore’s ranking on the World Bank’s Doing Business Surveys. The effectiveness of Singapore’s public bureaucracy is analyzed according to these four indicators in the next section.

Apart from documenting the effectiveness of the public bureaucracy in Singapore, this chapter is also concerned with explaining the nature of

public administration Singapore-style and why it works. The main thesis of this book is that, unlike the British colonial government, the PAP government is committed to the attainment of national development goals and has provided the SCS and statutory boards with competent personnel, adequate budget, and legislation to ensure the effective implementation of public policies. The reliance on meritocracy and competitive salaries has enabled the PAP government and the Public Service Commission (PSC) to attract and retain the “best and brightest” Singaporeans to join the SCS and statutory boards. Similarly, corruption, which was prevalent during the colonial period, has been minimized by the PAP government’s commitment to curb corruption as reflected in the impartial enforcement of the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB).

The final aim of this chapter is to discuss whether public administration Singapore-style can be transferred to other Asian countries. In view of the significant contextual differences between Singapore and other Asian countries, it might not be desirable or feasible to transplant Singapore’s model of public administration *in toto* to these countries. Nevertheless, some relevant public policies may be adopted and adapted by policy-makers to solve problems in their countries if their political leaders have the political will to provide the required personnel, budget, and legislation.

## **11.1. EFFECTIVENESS OF SINGAPORE’S PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY**

### *11.1.1. World Bank’s Governance Indicators*

The World Bank relies on six indicators to assess the level of governance in 212 countries from 1996 to 2008. However, for this chapter, only two indicators – government effectiveness and control of corruption – are discussed here as they are more relevant than the other four indicators of voice and accountability, political stability, regulatory quality, and rule of law. “Government effectiveness” refers to:

the quality of public service provision, the quality of the bureaucracy, the competence of civil servants, the independence of the civil service from political pressures, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to policies. (Kaufmann et al., 2004, p. 3)

Similarly, “control of corruption” refers to the government’s ability to curb corruption which is defined as “the exercise of public power for private

**Table 11.1.** Government Effectiveness of Singapore (1996–2008).

Year	Percentile Rank (0–100)	Governance Score (–2.5 to +2.5)
1996	99.5	+2.60
1998	100.0	+2.13
2000	100.0	+2.26
2002	98.1	+2.11
2003	98.6	+2.19
2004	99.1	+2.23
2005	98.6	+2.13
2006	99.5	+2.29
2007	100.0	+2.45
2008	100.0	+2.53

Source: [http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc\\_chart.asp#](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc_chart.asp#)

gain.” Thus, the existence of corruption indicates “a lack of respect of both the corrupter (typically a private citizen or firm) and the corrupted (typically a public official or politician) for the rules which govern their interactions, and hence represents a failure of governance” (Kaufmann et al., 2004, p. 4).

Table 11.1 shows that Singapore’s percentile rank on the World Bank’s governance indicator on government effectiveness from 1996 to 2008 ranges from 98.1 in 2002 to 100 in 1998, 2000, 2007, and 2008. Similarly, the governance score for this indicator varies from +2.11 in 2002 to +2.60 in 1996. A comparison of the percentile ranks and governance scores on government effectiveness for 25 Asian countries in 2008 in Table 11.2 shows that Singapore is ranked first with a percentile rank of 100 and a governance score of +2.53.

In terms of control of corruption, Singapore’s percentile rank is also high and ranges from 96.1 in 2007 to 99.5 in 2002 and 2008 as can be seen from Table 11.3. Table 11.4 confirms Singapore’s superiority in percentile rank and governance score for the control of corruption among the 25 Asian countries in 2008.

### 11.1.2. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index

Chapter 9 has shown that Singapore has been effective in curbing corruption as manifested in its consistently high ranking and scores on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) annual survey on corruption, and the World Bank’s control of corruption governance indicator (Table 9.4).

**Table 11.2.** Government Effectiveness of 25 Asian Countries in 2008.

Country	Percentile Rank (0–100)	Governance Score (–2.5 to +2.5)
Singapore	100.0	+2.53
Hong Kong SAR	95.3	+1.83
Japan	89.1	+1.46
South Korea	86.3	+1.26
Malaysia	83.9	+1.13
Macao SAR	80.6	+1.03
Brunei	79.6	+0.89
Taiwan	79.1	+0.88
China	63.5	+0.24
Bhutan	59.2	+0.11
Thailand	58.8	+0.11
Philippines	55.0	+0.00
India	53.6	–0.03
Indonesia	47.4	–0.29
Sri Lanka	46.9	–0.29
Vietnam	45.5	–0.31
Maldives	44.1	–0.35
Mongolia	27.5	–0.68
Pakistan	25.6	–0.73
Nepal	24.2	–0.75
Bangladesh	22.7	–0.77
Cambodia	19.4	–0.81
Laos	17.5	–0.84
Timor-Leste	12.3	–1.00
Afghanistan	8.5	–1.31
Myanmar	1.9	–1.68
North Korea	0.5	–2.12

Note: Hong Kong and Macao are the special administrative regions of China.

Source: [http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc\\_chart.asp#](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc_chart.asp#)

**Table 11.3.** Control of Corruption in Singapore (1996–2008).

Year	Percentile Rank (0–100)	Governance Score (–2.5 to +2.5)
1996	97.6	+2.23
1998	98.1	+2.19
2000	98.1	+2.18
2002	99.5	+2.37
2003	98.5	+2.31
2004	98.1	+2.31
2005	98.1	+2.17
2006	97.6	+2.19
2007	96.1	+2.22
2008	99.5	+2.34

Source: [http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc\\_chart.asp#](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc_chart.asp#)

**Table 11.4.** Control of Corruption among 25 Asian Countries in 2008.

Country	Percentile Rank (0–100)	Governance Score (–2.5 to +2.5)
Singapore	96.1	+2.20
Hong Kong SAR	92.3	+1.61
Japan	84.5	+1.20
Bhutan	80.2	+0.92
Macao SAR	72.5	+0.50
Taiwan	70.0	+0.41
South Korea	68.1	+0.36
Brunei	63.8	+0.23
Malaysia	62.3	+0.19
Sri Lanka	57.5	–0.13
India	47.3	–0.39
Thailand	44.0	–0.44
Mongolia	33.8	–0.61
China	30.9	–0.66
Nepal	30.4	–0.66
Vietnam	28.0	–0.69
Indonesia	27.1	–0.72
Maldives	23.7	–0.78
Philippines	22.2	–0.79
Pakistan	21.3	–0.83
Timor-Leste	16.9	–0.92
Laos	13.0	–1.00
Bangladesh	9.7	–1.05
Cambodia	8.2	–1.08
Myanmar	1.4	–1.46
Afghanistan	1.0	–1.53
North Korea	0.5	1.69

Note: Hong Kong and Macao are the special administrative regions of China.

Source: [http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc\\_chart.asp#](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc_chart.asp#)

Table 11.5 confirms Singapore's position as the least corrupt county among the 24 Asian countries on the 2009 CPI with a rank of third and a CPI score of 9.2.

### 11.1.3. Global Competitiveness Report's Indicators

As mentioned earlier, Singapore's rank and score on two indicators are discussed here. First, Table 11.6 shows that Singapore has retained its ranking of first position among the 59–80 countries included in the

**Table 11.5.** Transparency International's 2009 CPI for 24 Asian Countries.

Country	CPI Rank (1–180)	CPI Score (1–10) <sup>a</sup>
Singapore	3rd	9.2
Hong Kong SAR	12th	8.2
Japan	17th	7.7
Taiwan	37th	5.6
Brunei	39th	5.5
South Korea	39th	5.5
Macao SAR	43rd	5.3
Bhutan	49th	5.0
Malaysia	56th	4.5
China	79th	3.6
India	84th	3.4
Thailand	84th	3.4
Sri Lanka	97th	3.1
Indonesia	111th	2.8
Mongolia	120th	2.7
Vietnam	120th	2.7
Maldives	130th	2.5
Bangladesh	139th	2.4
Pakistan	139th	2.4
Philippines	139th	2.4
Nepal	143rd	2.3
Timor-Leste	146th	2.2
Cambodia	158th	2.0
Laos	158th	2.0
Myanmar	178th	1.4
Afghanistan	179th	1.3

*Note:* Hong Kong and Macao are the special administrative regions of China.

*Source:* [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2009/cpi\\_2009\\_table](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table)

<sup>a</sup>The score ranges from 1 = most corrupt to 10 = least corrupt.

*Global Competitiveness Reports'* indicator on the competence of their public sector officials from 1999 to 2002–2003.<sup>1</sup> Its score is also the highest and has varied from 4.52 in 1999, to 4.4 in 2000, to 4.7 in 2001–2002, and to 5.1 in 2002–2003.

Similarly, it can be seen from [Table 11.7](#) that Singapore has consistently been ranked first among the 59 to 133 countries included in the *Global Competitiveness Report's* indicator on the Public Trust in Politicians' Honesty. Singapore's score on this indicator ranges between 6.36 in 1999 to 6.4 in 2001–2002, 2002–2003, 2007–2008 and 2009–2010, and to 6.5 in 2000 and 2003–2004.

**Table 11.6.** Public Sector Competence of Selected Asian Countries (1999–2002/2003).

1999 ( <i>N</i> = 59 countries)	2000 ( <i>N</i> = 59 countries)	2001–2002 ( <i>N</i> = 75 countries)	2002–2003 ( <i>N</i> = 80 countries)
1. Singapore (4.52)	1. Singapore (4.4)	1. Singapore (4.7)	1. Singapore (5.1)
2. Vietnam (4.19)	2. Hong Kong SAR (3.8)	2. Japan (3.8)	2. Sri Lanka (4.5)
6. Japan (3.6)	3. Japan (3.6)	4. Hong Kong SAR (3.6)	3. China (4.1)
9. Hong Kong SAR (3.39)	4. Vietnam (3.6)	6. China (3.5)	5. Japan (4.0)
10. China (3.39)	10. China (3.4)	11. Taiwan (3.4)	9. Hong Kong SAR (3.7)
16. Taiwan (3.28)	17. Taiwan (3.2)	25. Vietnam (3.1)	14. Vietnam (3.5)
21. India (3.07)	24. South Korea (3)	27. South Korea (3)	18. Taiwan (3.4)
34. South Korea (2.54)	26. India (2.9)	34. India (2.9)	23. Malaysia (3.1)
37. Thailand (2.45)	35. Thailand (2.6)	44. Thailand (2.6)	24. South Korea (3.1)
43. Indonesia (2.36)	37. Malaysia (2.5)	48. Indonesia (2.6)	36. India (2.8)
46. Malaysia (2.24)	43. Indonesia (2.4)	55. Sri Lanka (2.3)	37. Thailand (2.8)
49. Philippines (2.05)	45. Philippines (2.3)	58. Philippines (2.2)	46. Bangladesh (2.4)
		65. Malaysia (2.1)	67. Indonesia (2.1)
		68. Bangladesh (2)	68. Philippines (2)

*Notes:* The score is indicated within brackets and ranges from 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree with this statement: “The competence of personnel in the public sector is higher than that in the private sector.” The number in front of the country indicates its rank.

*Sources:* Schwab, Porter, Sachs, Warner, and Levinson (1999, p. 242, Table 2.05), Porter et al. (2000, p. 238, Table 3.07), Schwab, Porter, Sachs, Cornelius, and McArthur (2002, p. 399, Table 6.06), and Cornelius (2003, p. 604, Table 6.06).

**Table 11.7. Public Trust in Politicians' Honesty in Selected Asian Countries (1999–2009/2010).**

1999 (N = 59)	2000 (N = 59)	2001–2002 (N = 75)	2002–2003 (N = 80)	2003–2004 (N = 102)	2007–2008 (N = 131)	2009–2010 (N = 133)
1. Singapore (6.36)	1. Singapore (6.5)	1. Singapore (6.4)	1. Singapore (6.4)	1. Singapore (6.5)	1. Singapore (6.4)	1. Singapore (6.4)
11. Hong Kong SAR (4.92)	7. Hong Kong SAR (5.5)	10. Hong Kong SAR (4.2)	5. Hong Kong SAR (5.2)	13. Hong Kong SAR (4.4)	11. Hong Kong SAR (5.2)	15. Hong Kong SAR (4.8)
20. Vietnam (3.87)	24. Vietnam (3.4)	15. Vietnam (3.8)	12. China (4.4)	19. Malaysia (3.8)	18. Malaysia (4.6)	20. Brunei (4.4)
26. China (3.5)	29. Malaysia (3.1)	18. China (3.8)	21. Vietnam (3.8)	20. China (3.8)	22. South Korea (4.0)	26. China (4.0)
27. Taiwan (3.46)	32. China (3.0)	29. Taiwan (3.2)	24. Malaysia (3.6)	24. Taiwan (3.6)	33. Japan (3.4)	33. Malaysia (3.8)
30. Malaysia (2.95)	34. Japan (2.9)	37. Thailand (2.8)	20. Taiwan (3.2)	25. Vietnam (3.5)	45. China (3.1)	36. Vietnam (3.6)
31. Japan (2.89)	35. Taiwan (2.9)	38. Malaysia (2.8)	36. Thailand (2.6)	38. Indonesia (3.1)	52. Vietnam (2.9)	42. Taiwan (3.4)
41. Indonesia (2.26)	40. Indonesia (2.5)	40. Japan (2.6)	39. South Korea (2.3)	40. Thailand (2.9)	57. Taiwan (2.8)	52. Indonesia (3.2)
45. Thailand (2.22)	44. South Korea (2.3)	49. India (2.1)	46. Sri Lanka (2.1)	42. South Korea (2.9)	60. Thailand (2.7)	54. Japan (3.1)
48. South Korea (2.1)	47. Thailand (2.1)	51. South Korea (2.1)	50. Japan (2.0)	51. Japan (2.3)	63. Indonesia (2.6)	55. Timor-Leste (3.1)
49. Philippines (2.02)	51. Philippines (2.0)	52. Philippines (2.1)	57. India (1.9)	56. Sri Lanka (2.2)	67. Cambodia (2.6)	59. Cambodia (3.0)
53. India (1.85)	53. India (1.9)	53. Indonesia (2.0)	61. Indonesia (1.7)	72. Pakistan (1.8)	70. Sri Lanka (2.4)	67. South Korea (2.8)
		56. Sri Lanka (2.0)	68. Bangladesh (1.6)	82. India (1.7)	76. Pakistan (2.3)	71. Thailand (2.7)
		69. Bangladesh (1.6)	69. Philippines (1.5)	90. Bangladesh (1.5)	83. India (2.2)	79. India (2.4)
				94. Philippines (1.4)	86. Timor Leste (2.1)	81. Sri Lanka (2.3)
					118. Nepal (1.7)	82. Pakistan (2.3)
					119. Philippines (1.7)	117. Bangladesh (1.8)
					122. Mongolia (1.6)	119. Mongolia (1.8)
					127. Bangladesh (1.4)	120. Nepal (1.8)
						130. Philippines (1.6)

*Notes:* The score ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree with this statement: "Public trust in the financial honesty of politicians is very high." The number in front of the country indicates its rank and the score is indicated within brackets.

*Sources:* Schwab et al. (1999, p. 327, Table 8.19), Porter et al. (2000, p. 253, Table 4.16), Schwab et al. (2002, p. 408, Table 7.07), Cornelius (2003, p. 619, Table 7.12), Sala-i-Martin (2004, p. 499, Table 7.10), Schwab and Porter (2007, p. 379, Table 1.04), and Schwab (2009, p. 349, Table 1.04).

## 11.1.4. World Bank's Doing Business Survey

Table 11.8 shows that Singapore has been ranked first among the 175 to 181 economies and the 23 Asian economies included in the World Bank's *Doing Business Surveys* from 2007 to 2009. The ease of doing business in Singapore is a reflection of the effectiveness of its government, the absence of red tape, and a lower level of perceived corruption. As indicated in Table 9.9 in Chapter 9, in 2009, it took four days to start a business in Singapore, 38 days to deal with construction permits, and nine days to register a property. In contrast, in Cambodia, which was ranked 135th out of the 181 economies in the *Doing Business 2009* survey, it required 86 days to start a business, 709 days to deal with licenses, and 56 days to register a property. Hence it is not surprising that the greater level of difficulty in doing business in Cambodia is manifested in the prevalence of red tape and rampant corruption.

**Table 11.8.** Ranking of 23 Asian Economies on World Bank's Doing Business Surveys (2007–2009).

Economy	2007 Rank (1–175)	2008 Rank (1–181)	2009 Rank (1–181)
Singapore	1	1	1
Hong Kong SAR	5	4	4
Japan	11	12	12
Thailand	18	19	13
South Korea	23	22	23
Malaysia	25	25	20
Mongolia	45	55	58
Taiwan	47	58	61
Pakistan	74	74	77
Brunei	NA	83	88
Bangladesh	88	104	110
Sri Lanka	89	103	102
China	93	90	83
Nepal	100	111	121
Vietnam	104	87	92
Philippines	126	136	140
India	134	120	122
Indonesia	135	127	129
Bhutan	138	122	124
Cambodia	143	150	135
Lao PDR	159	162	165
Afghanistan	162	161	162
Timor-Leste	174	170	170

Sources: Compiled from World Bank (2006, p. 6) and World Bank (2008, p. 6). The online versions of these reports are available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/downloads/>

## 11.2. EXPLAINING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SINGAPORE-STYLE

The eight features of public administration Singapore-style are summarized in **Box 11.1**. As these features have been discussed in Chapter 1, the aim of this section is to provide an explanation for these features.

Public administration Singapore-style is the product of its policy context and the various policies introduced by the PAP government since its assumption of office in June 1959. As shown in Chapter 2, Singapore's policy context has been "enabling" rather than "vulnerable" and the PAP leaders have succeeded in transforming Singapore into a first world country within 41 years by "stretching" the constraints imposed by its policy context.

As discussed in the previous chapters, when the PAP government assumed power in June 1959 after winning the May 1959 general election, it inherited a huge budget deficit, a serious housing shortage, and an unemployment rate of 14 percent. To deal with the budget deficit, the PAP government reduced the salaries of senior civil servants by removing their cost of living allowances and saved S\$10 million. The Housing and Development Board (HDB) was formed in February 1960 to implement the low-cost public housing program and the Economic Development Board (EDB) was created in August 1961 to improve economic growth by attracting foreign investment to Singapore.

In 1960, Singapore was a poor country with a GDP per capita of S\$1,330 (US\$443). With a population of 1.6 million, the then Minister for Finance, Goh Keng Swee, said that it was not possible to support an extensive importation substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy. He explained why Singapore joined Malaysia:

We therefore sought a political merger with the then independent state of Malaya, hoping that the combined market would support ISI in the enlarged national territory. We succeeded in the political aim of merger in 1963, but our hopes for ISI were not realized. After two years, we were expelled from Malaysia to emerge as a small independent state on our own. It was a terrifying experience for Singaporeans of my generation. Our economic problems remained unsolved, we had no natural resources and the population had been growing at a brisk pace. Further, between 1959 and 1963, the Communist United Front organizations attacked the Government from every direction, giving us an unenviable reputation for political instability. (Goh, 1995, p. 24)

Singapore joined the Federation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963 for three reasons. First, the PAP leaders viewed merger with Malaysia as the only solution to Singapore's serious economic problems as its economy

**Box 11.1.** Major Features of Public Administration Singapore-Style

1. Macho-meritocracy or the reliance on meritocracy to recruit the “best and brightest” political leaders and civil servants to form the government and civil service.
2. Reliance on competitive salaries and accelerated promotion to compete with the private sector for talent by attracting and retaining talented individuals in the civil service and government.
3. The problem of corruption has been minimized in Singapore because of the PAP government’s political will as reflected in the allocation of adequate legal powers, budget, and personnel to the CPIB to enable it to enforce the POCA impartially.
4. Administrative reforms are employed by the PAP government to enhance effectiveness in the SCS and to change the attitudes of civil servants to enable them to contribute to the attainment of national development goals.
5. Statutory boards contribute to national development in Singapore by reducing the workload of the SCS and accelerating the implementation of socio-economic development programs.
6. Singapore has a good record in implementing public policies effectively because of the PAP government’s support, the effectiveness of the SCS and statutory boards, the low level of corruption, the reliance on meritocracy in recruiting and promoting civil servants, strict disciplinary control in the SCS, the reliance on computerization and information technology after 1981, and its small size.
7. The PAP government’s commitment to improve the public bureaucracy’s quality of service to the population can be clearly seen in the creation of the Feedback Unit in March 1985, the formation of the Service Improvement Unit in April 1991, and the introduction of PS21 in May 1995.
8. Reliance on policy diffusion by the PAP government to solve the problems in Singapore by learning from other countries’ experiences and adapting the lessons learnt to suit the Singapore context.

was based on entrepot trade. Second, merger would enhance Singapore’s political stability and attract foreign investment as the central government of Malaysia would be able to deal with the growing communist threat more effectively (Fletcher, 1969, pp. 5–6). Finally, merger with Malaysia

was necessary as it was felt that an independent Singapore “would not be politically, militarily, or economically viable” (Fletcher, 1969, p. 6).

However, Singapore’s sojourn in Malaysia was short-lived as after nearly two years, Singapore separated from the federation and became independent on 9 August 1965. As their vision of Singapore as part of Malaysia was shattered by separation, the PAP leaders had to “reinvent the wheel” by focusing instead on the challenges facing an independent Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew expressed his fears and concerns after separation thus:

We had been asked to leave Malaysia and go our own way with no signposts to our next destination. We faced tremendous odds with an improbable chance of survival. . . . We inherited the island without its hinterland, a heart without a body. . . . My third and biggest headache was the economy – how to make a living for our people? . . . On that 9th day of August 1965, I started out with great trepidation on a journey along an unmarked road to an unknown destination. (Lee, 2000b, pp. 19, 23, 25)

After “pondering over these problems and the limited options available,” Lee concluded that:

an island city-state in Southeast Asia could not be ordinary if it was to survive. We had to make extraordinary efforts to become a tightly knit, rugged and adaptable people who could do things better and cheaper than our neighbors, because they wanted to bypass us and render obsolete our role as the entrepot and middleman for the trade of the region. We had to be different. Our greatest asset was the trust and confidence of the people. These we had earned by the fight we had put up on their behalf against the communists and the Malay Ultras [radicals], our refusal to be browbeaten and cowed at a time when the police and the army were both in the hands of the central government. . . . I needed this political strength to maximize what use we could make of our few assets, a natural world-class harbor sited in a strategic location astride one of the busiest sea-lanes of the world. (Lee, 2000b, p. 24)

Lee also revealed in his memoirs that “after several years of disheartening trial and error,” he concluded that “Singapore’s best hope lay with the American multinational corporations” (Lee, 2000b, p. 75). After gradually crystallizing his thoughts, Lee decided on a two-pronged strategy to overcome Singapore’s disadvantages:

The first [prong] was to leapfrog the region, as the Israelis had done. . . . Since our neighbors were out to reduce their ties with us, we had to link up with the developed world – America, Europe and Japan – and attract their manufacturers to produce in Singapore and export their products to the developed countries. . . . The second part of my strategy was to create a First World oasis in a Third World region. . . . If Singapore could establish First World standards in public and personal safety, health, education, telecommunications, transportation and services, it would become a base camp for entrepreneurs, engineers, managers and other professionals who had business to do in

the region. This meant that we had to train our people and equip them to provide First World standards of service. . . . We had one simple guiding principle for survival, that Singapore had to be more rugged, better organized and more efficient than others in the region. If we were only as good as our neighbors there was no reason for businesses to be based here. We had to make it possible for investors to operate successfully and profitably in Singapore despite our lack of a domestic market and natural resources. (Lee, 2000b, pp. 75–77)

To implement this two-pronged strategy, the PAP government needed an effective public bureaucracy to ensure the implementation of its various public policies. Accordingly, the PAP leaders have not only continued the tradition of meritocracy introduced by the British colonial government in January 1951 with the establishment of the PSC but expanded it to include the appointment of ministers. The reliance on meritocracy in the recruitment and promotion of civil servants and ministers is responsible for attracting the “best and brightest” Singaporeans to join the SCS, statutory boards and the government. According to Lee Kuan Yew, “the key to [Singapore’s] success was the quality of the men in charge” (Lee, 2000b, p. 87).

Having attracted talented Singaporeans to join the public bureaucracy and the government, measures were introduced to prevent their departure for private sector jobs. From 1972 onwards, public sector salaries were periodically increased to minimize the gap between salaries in the public and private sectors. From 1995, public sector salaries were benchmarked to the salaries of the top earners of six private sector professions. In addition to competitive salaries, talented scholar-bureaucrats were also promoted rapidly.

To enhance Singapore’s comparative advantage in attracting foreign investment, the PAP government wisely decided from the outset to minimize corruption by relying on the CPIB to enforce impartially the POCA. The SCS was reorganized, statutory boards such as the HDB and EDB were formed, and the civil servants were re-socialized to eradicate their “colonial mentality” and to ensure their cooperation for the attainment of national development goals.

With the support of the political leaders, an effective SCS and statutory boards, a low level of corruption, and the advantages of being a city-state, it is not surprising that Singapore has a good record in implementing public policies. Apart from successfully delivering the goods to the population during its 50 years in power, the PAP government has also improved the quality of service provided to the public through the formation of the Feedback Unit in March 1985, the creation of the Service Improvement

Unit in April 1991, and the introduction of Public Service for the 21st Century in May 1995.

The critical factor responsible for Singapore's success is the quality of leadership shown by its political leaders, civil servants, and employees of the statutory boards. They have relied on policy diffusion to solve some of Singapore's problems by learning from the successes and failures of policy measures adopted in other countries and adapting relevant policy solutions to suit Singapore's context. However, for problems which are unique and no relevant solutions can be borrowed from other countries' experience, Singapore's policy-makers have formulated their own creative solutions. For example, electronic road pricing was introduced to curb traffic congestion in the Central Business District during the peak hours. Another example is the invention of the thermal imaging scanners which were

**Table 11.9.** Features of Public Administration Singapore-Style and Their Causes.

Features of Public Administration Singapore-Style	Causes
1. Macho-meritocracy	The PAP government retained the PSC and expanded meritocracy to include both civil servants and political leaders
2. Competing with private sector for the "best and brightest" Singaporeans	Talented Singaporeans are attracted to join the SCS, statutory boards, and the government through the awarding of scholarships, competitive salaries, and accelerated promotion for scholars
3. Low level of corruption	The PAP government enacted the POCA which empowered the CPIB to enforce the law impartially
4. Comprehensive administrative reforms	The PAP government relied on both institutional and attitudinal reforms to improve the effectiveness of the SCS
5. Statutory boards	The PAP government relied on statutory boards to reduce the SCS's workload and to accelerate the implementation of the socio-economic development programs
6. Effective policy implementation	The PAP government's strong support, the effectiveness of the SCS and statutory boards, low level of corruption, and Singapore's small size have resulted in effective policy implementation
7. Improving service to the public	The PAP government introduced these measures: Feedback Unit in March 1985; Service Improvement Unit in April 1991; and PS21 in May 1995 to improve the quality of service to the public
8. Policy diffusion	The PAP government solves the problems facing Singapore by learning from other countries' experiences and by formulating new solutions for unique problems

installed at all ports of entry into Singapore during the 2003 SARS crisis to detect fever among arriving visitors (Quah, 2007c, p. 124).

In short, as summarized in Table 11.9, the eight features of public administration Singapore-style can be attributed to the many policies formulated by the PAP leaders after their assumption of office in June 1959 in response to the constraints imposed by the policy context.

### **11.3. IS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SINGAPORE-STYLE TRANSFERABLE?**

Is public administration Singapore-style transferable to other Asian countries? In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to identify the contextual differences between Singapore and the other Asian countries.

Table 11.10 shows clearly the significant contextual differences between Singapore and the other 21 Asian countries. In terms of size, Singapore is the second smallest country after the Macao Special Administrative Region, which has a land area of 29.2 sq km. At the other extreme, are the larger countries of China and India, which are 13,523 times and 4,650 times larger than Singapore, respectively.

A second important contextual difference is Singapore's population, which is only larger than those of Mongolia's population of 2.7 million, Timor-Leste's population of 1.2 million, Bhutan's population of 682,321, Macao's population of 538,100, and Brunei's population of 400,000. On the other hand, Singapore's population of 4.83 million is dwarfed by the huge populations of China, India, and Indonesia.

The third contextual difference between Singapore and the other Asian countries is its affluence as manifested in its GDP per capita of US\$38,972.1 in 2008, which is the highest among all the 22 Asian countries listed in Table 11.10. In contrast, the GDP per capita of these five countries are less than US\$1,000 viz., Cambodia (US\$818), Laos (US\$580), Bangladesh (US\$506), Timor-Leste (US\$469), and Nepal (US\$459).

In short, Singapore is a city-state, which is richer and has a smaller territory and population for the PAP government to govern than most of the other Asian countries. Its favorable policy context has enabled the PAP government, which has been in power since June 1959, to implement policies effectively, to curb corruption, and to ensure the ease of doing business in Singapore, as demonstrated in Singapore's superior ranking on the World Bank's governance indicator on government effectiveness in 2008 and

**Table 11.10.** Policy Contexts of 22 Asian Countries.

Country	Land Area (sq km)	Population (2008)	GDP per capita (US\$) (2008)	Government Effectiveness Percentile Rank (2008)	CPI Rank & Score (2008)	Doing Business Survey Rank (2008)
Singapore	710	4.83 m	\$38,972.1	100	4th (9.2)	1
Hong Kong SAR	1,104	7.30 m	\$30,755.1	95.3	12th (8.1)	4
Japan	377,727	127.9 m	\$38,559.1	89.1	18th (7.3)	12
South Korea	99,274	48.4 m	\$19,504.5	86.3	40th (5.6)	22
Malaysia	332,665	27.0 m	\$8,140.7	83.9	47th (5.1)	25
Macao SAR	29.2	538,100	\$36,357	80.6	43rd (5.4)	NA
Brunei	5,765	400,000	\$37,053	79.6	NA	83
Taiwan	36,179	22.7 m	\$17,040.1	79.1	39th (5.7)	58
China	9,560,900	1.336.3 m	\$3,315.3	63.5	72nd (3.6)	90
Bhutan	47,000	682,321	\$1,770	59.2	45th (5.2)	122
Thailand	513,115	64.3 m	\$4,115.3	58.8	80th (3.5)	19
Philippines	300,000	89.7 m	\$1,866	55.0	141st (2.3)	136
India	3,287,263	1.186.2 m	\$1,016.2	53.6	85th (3.4)	120
Indonesia	1,904,443	234.3 m	\$2,246.3	47.4	126th (2.6)	127
Sri Lanka	65,610	19.4 m	\$1,971.8	46.9	92nd (3.2)	103
Vietnam	331,114	88.5 m	\$1,040.4	45.5	121st (2.7)	87
Mongolia	1,565,000	2.7 m	\$1,980.8	27.5	102nd (3.0)	55
Pakistan	803,940	167 m	\$1,044.5	25.6	134th (2.5)	74
Nepal	147,000	28.8 m	\$459.3	24.2	121st (2.7)	111
Bangladesh	143,998	161.3 m	\$506.1	22.7	147th (2.1)	104
Cambodia	181,000	14.7 m	\$818.1	19.4	166th (1.8)	150
Laos	237,000	6.67 m	\$580	17.5	151st (2.0)	162
Timor-Leste	15,000	1.2 m	\$468.8	12.3	145th (2.2)	170
Afghanistan	652,000	32.73 m	\$1,000	8.5	176th (1.5)	161

*Note:* Hong Kong and Macao are the special administrative regions of China. Macao's population is based on the 2007 figure.

*Sources:* Economist (2008); BBC News Country Profiles at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>; CIA, *The World Factbook* at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/>; United States Department of State, Background Notes on Asian Countries at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn>; Government Information Bureau (2008, p. 8); Department of Statistics, Singapore, "Key Annual Indicators" at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html>; and Schwab (2009, pp. 341–342, Tables 0.02–0.03).

the *Doing Business 2008* survey, and Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Singapore's rapid transformation from being a poor third world country in 1959 to a first world nation in 2000 has attracted a great deal attention universally. Hence it is not surprising that policy-makers from many countries have visited Singapore to find out the reasons for its success and

to consider whether they could draw useful lessons for their own countries (Quah, 1998, p. 119). One of Singapore's earliest admirers was the late Deng Xiaoping of China, who decided to use Singapore as a model for his country's development after his first visit in 1978. Deng's call to adopt the Singapore model resulted in the visits by 400 delegations of mayors, governors, and party secretaries on study missions from China during the same year.<sup>2</sup>

In 1995, Singapore was ranked as the second most competitive country in the world, after the United States (Zyla, 1995, p. 76). According to the *World Competitiveness Report 1995*, Singapore's "record offers a blueprint for other countries on how to succeed."<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, an American scholar based in Singapore noted in 1996 that:

Singapore's long-time embrace of open-door economic practices has drawn favorable notice worldwide. Indeed, there is much to admire, as Singapore is renowned for being clean, green, law-abiding, efficient, and a prime choice for expatriates to work and raise their families away from the rather "permissive" lifestyles of home countries like America, Britain, or Australia. (Sikorski, 1996, p. 819)

More recently, Singapore has been ranked third with a score of 5.55 after Switzerland and the United States on the Global Competitiveness Index 2009–2010 (Schwab, 2009, p. 13).

Other admirers have recommended the emulation of Singapore's success in environmental planning and management, and in e-government. For example, Josef Leitmann has identified "a variety of good practices that the city-state has employed in both environmental planning and management" (Leitmann, 2000, p. 1). Similarly, Archana G. Gulati has recommended that India can improve its "highly fragmented" and uncoordinated approach to e-government by following Singapore's reliance on a single agency for implementing e-government (Gulati, 2006, p. 204).

A recent global survey conducted by Gallup identified Singapore as "a top immigration hot spot" with the highest Potential Net Migration Index (PNMI) of 260 percent. The PNMI refers to "the estimated number of adults who wish to leave a country permanently subtracted from the estimated number who wish to immigrate to the country, as a proportion of the total adult population." Singapore's high PNMI score is not surprising as, according to the United Nations' *2009 Human Development Report*, Singapore is ranked 10th in the world as immigrants constitute 35 percent of the population, and has a low emigration rate of 6.3 percent. The Gallup survey also observed that Singapore's population would expand to

13 million if “it were to take in all adults who wish to settle in the country” (Lin, 2009, p. A4).

In view of the worldwide interest in Singapore’s model of development and the contextual differences between Singapore and other Asian countries, how transferable is public administration Singapore-style? Needless to say, the option of copying *in toto* public administration Singapore-style is not feasible for many Asian countries because of Singapore’s unique policy context and circumstances.

In 1887, Woodrow Wilson stressed the need to “Americanize” European administrative practices “in thought, principle and aim” (Wilson, 1887, p. 203). Advising American scholars on public administration “not to be frightened at the idea of looking into foreign systems of administration for instruction and suggestion,” Wilson asked:

But why should we not use such parts of foreign contrivances as we want, if they be in any way serviceable? We are in no danger of using them in a foreign way. We borrow rice, but we do not eat it with chopsticks. (Wilson, 1887, p. 219)

More importantly, Wilson distinguished between administration and politics, and he argued that the politics-administration dichotomy “makes the comparative method so safe in the field of administration” because:

If I see a murderous fellow sharpening a knife cleverly, I can borrow his way of sharpening the knife without borrowing his probable intention to commit murder with it; ... By keeping this distinction in view ... we are on perfectly safe ground, and can learn without error what foreign systems have to teach us. ... We can thus scrutinize the anatomy of foreign governments without fear of getting any of their diseases into our veins; dissect alien systems without apprehension of blood-poisoning. (Wilson, 1887, p. 220)

Similarly, in evaluating the applicability of Singapore’s policy models for reform in urban China, Robert M. Pease has rightly cautioned that:

The successful policy of country A cannot simply be replanted in the soil of struggling target country B. Instead careful attention must be directed to the wider policy contexts involved as well as to the feasibility of policy transfer. ... Policies, like garden plants, cannot simply be plucked from one environment to be replanted in another. There are questions of soil type, rainfall, and sunlight just as there are questions of government capacity, efficiency and integrity. (Pease, 1996, pp. 27–28, 148)

Apart from the contextual differences which hinder the implementation of public policies in other Asian countries, these countries also lack the four preconditions for the PAP government’s effectiveness in policy implementation such as a strong parliamentary majority; economic affluence; a low level of corruption; and an effective public bureaucracy. For example, as

discussed in Chapter 6, it would be too costly economically and politically for many Asian countries to increase public sector salaries to attract their “best and brightest” citizens to the public bureaucracy and to retain them.

In short, even if public administration Singapore-style is considered to be desirable by policy-makers in other Asian countries, it might not be feasible for them to introduce the Singapore model in public administration because the preconditions for success are absent.

While it is not possible to transfer entirely the various policies discussed in the previous chapters to other Asian countries, it is nevertheless possible for these countries to be inspired by Singapore’s experience and even to emulate some of its policies. These Asian countries should follow Singapore’s reliance on policy diffusion by identifying relevant policies and customizing these policies to suit their own contexts.

A good illustration is Singapore’s adaptation of Japan’s *koban* (or police post) system because of its effectiveness in curbing crime (Quah & Quah, 1987, p. 7). The contextual differences between Japan and Singapore necessitated the adaptation of the *koban* system to suit Singapore’s local circumstances. The decision to customize the *koban* system to suit Singapore’s own needs was wise because “if the *koban* system had been transplanted to Singapore *in toto*, it would have been quite difficult for Singaporeans to accept and support such a Japanese institution” (Quah & Quah, 1987, p. 108). Accordingly, the *koban* system was “Singaporeanized” by renaming it as the Neighborhood Police Post (NPP) system. More importantly, other modifications were made including:

the location of the NPPs, the myriad of services provided by the NPPs, and the timing, frequency and manner of conducting the family visits by NPP officers, [which] were all determined after taking into account such special features as the multi-racial nature of the population and the high proportion of people living in HDB flats. (Quah & Quah, 1987, p. 108)

Thus, the NPP has been effective in curbing crime in Singapore because of the modification of the Japanese *koban* system to suit the local context.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, while it is difficult if not impossible to transfer public administration Singapore-style *in toto* to other Asian countries, it is nevertheless possible for these countries to emulate and adapt some features of public administration Singapore-style to suit their own needs, provided that their political leaders, civil servants, and population are prepared to make the necessary changes. Indeed, public administration Singapore-style can be an inspiration to policy-makers in other Asian countries by illustrating the paramount importance of having honest and competent political leaders

and senior civil servants who share the goal of formulating and implementing policies that benefit both their citizens and countries.

### NOTES

1. Unfortunately, the 2003–2004 *Global Competitiveness Report* and subsequent reports did not include this indicator.

2. Kristof (1992), quoted in Pease (1996, p. 1).

3. Quoted in Latif (1996, p. 34).

4. The introduction of the NPP system in “B” Division resulted in a 10 percent decrease in the crime rate in Toa Payoh constituency from June to August 1983. Furthermore, the improved rapport between the police and public and easy access to the eight NPPs in “B” Division led to a 45 percent increase in the number of police reports on minor crimes. In short, the NPP system is effective because it has “institutionalized the image of the police as friends and not as enforcers of law and order.” See Quah and Quah (1987, p. 103).

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