

The Role of Service Improvement in Modernization of the Public Sector

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that service improvement contributes both directly and indirectly to the development of a high performing public service.

The paper describes the attributes of a high performing public sector and discusses how service improvement initiatives are the major approach to achieving a public service focused on results and quality service, one aspect of a high functioning public sector. It also identifies the key elements of implementing service quality based on the “Q” framework adopted in Qatar and shows how the implementation of service improvement, by addressing all elements of the “Q” framework, contributes to enhancing other key attributes of a high performing public sector.

Service Improvement in Qatar

The importance of service improvement was recognized by the Emir in 2002 in calling for a public sector that would “*achieve the highest standards of effectiveness and efficiency...[by improving] the standard and quality of the services being delivered by the public sector to ensure high quality and low cost of service delivery.*”¹

Qatar’s Service Improvement Initiative began in 2004. The Service Improvement Initiative has already attained a number of important milestones. These include assessing service quality, reporting on service integration, and reaching out directly to the people who use Qatar’s public services by conducting Qatar’s first National Client Satisfaction Survey.² A proposed National Service Improvement Plan has been developed and is under review. Based on the work done to date and input from the service improvement community in Qatar, Qatar’s National Vision for Service Delivery is:

The Government of Qatar will deliver high-quality, timely, and accessible services that respond to changing client needs and ongoing feedback.³

International practice suggests that service improvement is an important component of public sector modernization. As the State of Qatar is considering the next steps in its service improvement journey, the question is being asked “how will service improvement contribute to the broader agenda of public sector modernization in Qatar?”

¹ Emiri Decree, No 10, 2002

² Planning Council, National Service Improvement Plan, *Mary Tate, Gillian Kerr, Sandra Kahale, Dina Abbas*, March 29, 2007, Page 10 See also: Preliminary Assessment Report: Service Quality Approach, *Public Services Development Project, Faye Schmidt and Erika Graffunder, May 2004* Integrated Service Delivery Report, *Public Services Development Project, Erika Graffunder and Art Daniels, May 2004*. State of Qatar, National Client Satisfaction Survey, Detailed Report, *Andreas Noe*, January, 2007

³ Ibid, Page 13

Public Sector Modernization

Modernization of the public sector is one of the key goals of the State of Qatar. It is guided by:

- *Qatar's Constitution* – which defines the future governance structure of Qatar.
- *Qatar's National Vision* – which includes the country's vision ... features such as a strong vibrant and diversified economy, an open and supportive society, and a strong, stable legal and regulatory environment along with a growing private sector.
- *Public Sector Vision* – which includes a vision of government that is open, accountable and objective; responsive to the changing needs of Qatar and its people; free of red tape; and compares well to international standards of public sector performance.⁴

A modern public sector, based on inclusiveness (equal treatment and equal participation) and accountability (transparency and contestability)⁵ is a cornerstone of development. The World Bank argues that poor governance results in weak service delivery because of a lack of competition in service delivery and limited citizen involvement in policy making and policy review. In addition, it is argued, poor governance leads to reduced economic growth and productivity, and limited investment.⁶ For these reasons, modernization of the public sector, that is, the creation of a high performing public service, is a key component of an overall development agenda.

Characteristics of a Modern Public Service

Based on a review of public administration theory and international best practices on modernization of public service, six highly integrated key attributes of a high performing public service have been identified for improvement of the public service in Qatar.⁷ Improving public service on these six attributes results in a high performing, modern public sector.

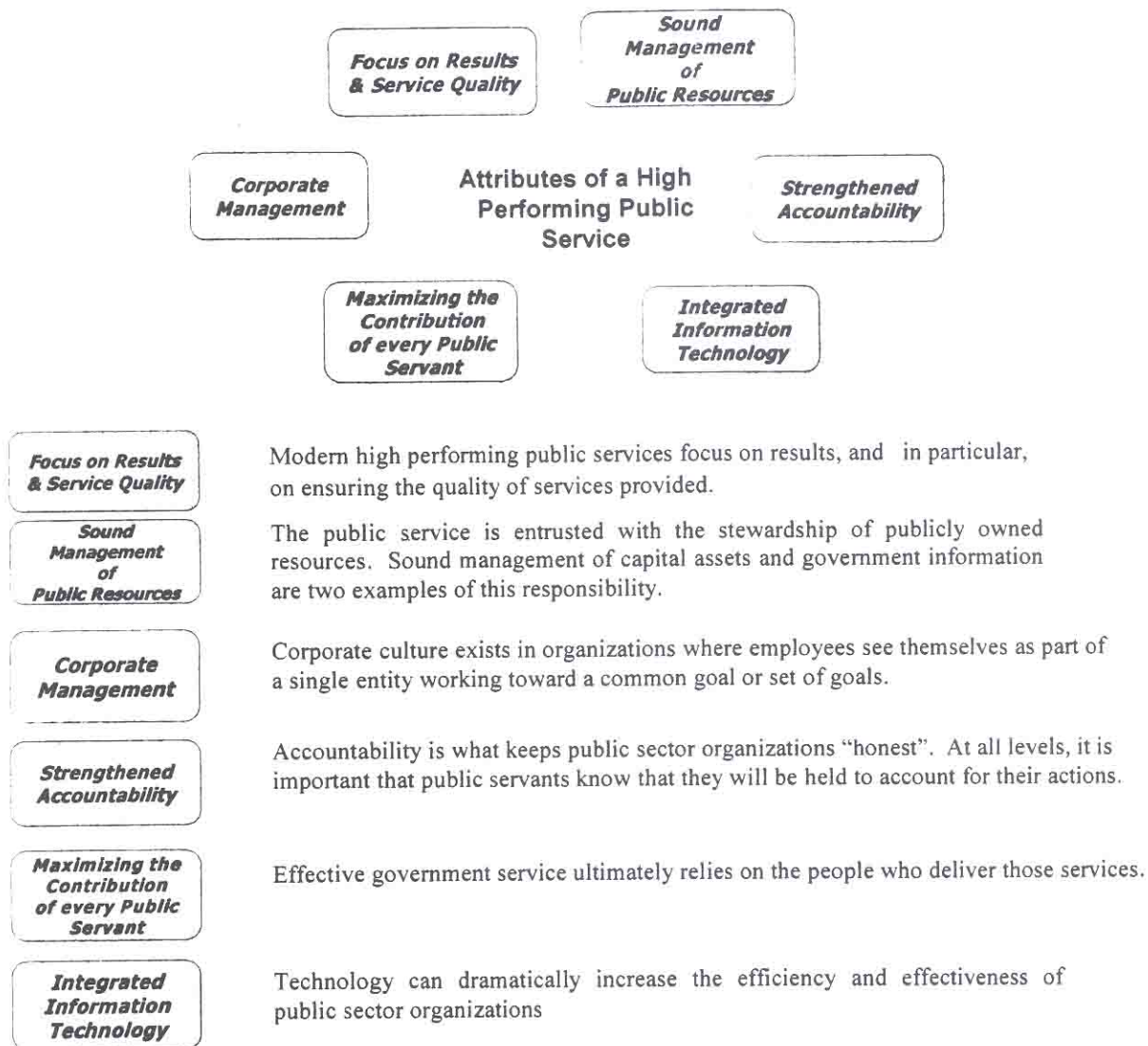
⁴ Government of Qatar, Public Service Development Project, Assessment Report. Version .90, April, 2004. Page 19.

⁵ Ibid, Page 20. See also, World Bank, "Better Governance for Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Enhancing Inclusiveness and Accountability", 2003

⁶ Ibid, Page 22

⁷ Ibid, Page 29 - 33

Figure 1 – Attributes of a High Performing Public Service



One of the six attributes of a high performing public service is “focus on results and service quality”. This attribute encompasses the following:

Modern high performing public services focus on results, and in particular, on ensuring the quality of services provided. Policies are described in terms of the desired results (outcomes and outputs), and the effectiveness of government programs and services is measured by the degree to which those results are achieved. Service quality initiatives are driven by (and respond to) the “voice of the client” and involve cultural change as well as structure, planning, measurement and process improvements.⁸

⁸ Ibid, Page 29

A focus on results and service quality is a key attribute of a high performing modern public service because it results in:

Improving overall services.

Increasing client satisfaction, often leading to improved relations among government, citizens, residents, and businesses.

Reducing service delivery costs and simplifying processes.

Supporting government priorities, such as creating a more attractive climate for business or improving quality of life for citizens and residents.

Encouraging foreign and business investment through enhanced responsiveness to the needs of businesses (e.g., for transparent government, simplified processes and consistent service). The costs of doing business are much greater in nations with inefficient and slow public services and regulatory environments.⁹

Service improvement initiatives are the main vehicle for achieving improvement on this attribute of a modern government. With respect to the remaining five attributes, service improvement alone does not result in the necessary improvement. However, it can be demonstrated that service improvement initiatives contribute to the achievement of the other five attributes as well.

Focus on Results and Quality Service:

Service Improvement's Direct Contribution to Public Service Modernization:

Service improvement initiatives directly address the attribute of a modern public service entitled "focus on results and service quality". According to the proposed National Service Improvement Plan,

can be understood as doing the right things, the right way, with client needs at the centre of what is done. It relates to the degree of excellence of a service, taking into account elements that include effectiveness, efficiency, and client satisfaction. Research in Qatar shows that timeliness, access, staff responsiveness, and outcome are the key factors in how clients perceive service quality.

is the term applied broadly to efforts aimed at increasing the quality of services. In Qatar...the emphasis of service improvement work has been on transitioning to a client-centred model of service delivery. ...service improvement can be understood as the process of designing, delivering and continuously improving effective services that meet clients' needs for convenience and quality.¹⁰

Integrated service delivery is an important aspect of service improvement. Truly client-centric service delivery often leads to service integration, where several organizations work together to provide seamless service to the clients.

Focus on Results & Service Quality

Achieving focus on results and service quality requires a disciplined process which uses many tools and techniques to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery and to enhance client satisfaction. It is an ongoing process which addresses interaction of front line staff with clients, provides choice of access channels, and streamlines processes

⁹ Planning Council, National Service Improvement Plan, *Mary Tate, Gillian Kerr, Sandra Kahale, Dina Abbas*, March 29, 2007, Page Ibid, Page 8

¹⁰ Ibid Page 7

end-to-end. To be successful, service improvement requires long term vision, commitment and active involvement of the leadership of an organization.

In order to guide its service improvement activities, the State of Qatar has adopted the “Q” framework, which is based on decades of public sector service improvement around the world. It sets out the actions that must be taken in order to successfully implement service improvement.¹¹

Figure 2: Service Quality Improvement Framework—the “Q”



Vision and Leadership

Senior management demonstrates leadership by establishing a culture of excellence, setting direction for the organization, monitoring the performance of the organization and setting priorities for improvement.

Listening to Clients

The voice of the client is brought into the centre of the organization in regular, systematic ways.

Planning

At both the government-wide and ministry levels there are strong SQ improvement plans that build on client input and incorporate strategic priorities and objectives.

Setting Service Standards

Clear standards are used to tell clients what to expect.

Performing and Measuring

The organization's key service delivery processes are measured and monitored to ensure consistent service delivery, and periodically reviewed for improvement purposes, to reduce costs and to enhance value for money.

Changing Culture

The organization develops a workforce with the capabilities required to accomplish its SQ objectives and a work environment that supports their efforts.

¹¹ Ibid, Page 18

To achieve “focus on results and service quality”, one of the hallmarks of a modern, high-performing public service, every aspect of the “Q” framework must be addressed.

Vision and Leadership

An organization’s leadership must understand the importance of service improvement and be committed to implementing it over the long term. Initiatives which enhance leaders understanding of, and commitment to, service improvement are important to achieve this goal.

Listening to Clients

Gathering input from clients on their service needs and expectations is essential to the design of effective, client-centric service delivery. Continuous feedback through comment cards, web-based feedback forms, and complaint mechanisms provide ongoing input from customers. Periodic surveys provide a more comprehensive view of client concerns. Input from clients must be analyzed and incorporated into service improvement plans.

Planning

Planning for service improvement takes place at both the strategic and operational levels. At the strategic level, initiatives which address both strategic priorities and client needs must be identified and incorporated into the strategic planning of an organization. At the operational level, sound knowledge of operational processes and metrics allows planning for continuous improvement initiatives.

Setting Service Standards

Setting service standards and communicating them publicly promotes service improvement because actions must be taken to achieve the defined service standards. It is important to ensure that standards challenge the organization, but are achievable. Once service standard are consistently being met, particularly if clients are asking for improved service, new service standards should be set to continuously challenge the organization to improve.

Performing and Measuring

Service improvement initiatives must be designed, and implemented. The performance of the service is then measured to gauge the results of improvement initiatives. The development of performance measures related to service improvement is an important step to developing a results oriented organization.

Changing Culture

Engaged and motivated staff is critical to the success of service improvement. Initiatives which develop staff to their full potential, encourage creativity and innovation, and reward excellence contribute to the development of a service culture in an organization.

By undertaking all the elements in the “Q” framework, over time, a public service organization will become “focused on results and service quality”.

Five Remaining Attributes of High Performing Public Service: Contribution of Service Improvement

In addition to the direct contribution of service improvement to a high performing public service, service improvement can also contribute to the remaining five attributes of a high performing public service. Some of the broader benefits of service improvement are:

Supporting public sector accountability by focusing on client satisfaction.

Fostering enhanced public sector capacity through the development of transferable skills in key areas such as project management, business process analysis and design, governance, planning, and change management.

Providing an excellent training and practice ground for implementing performance-based measures and incentives. Most government initiatives are difficult to measure in the short term. Service improvement projects tend to have immediate and measurable results, and they can be used to introduce a performance culture into government.

Developing management capacity in areas such as planning, creating performance measures and measuring performance, and staff development.

Contributing to fuller engagement and increased skills of staff, thereby building the management capacity and elements of success for government improvement as a whole¹²

By examining the approaches, tools and techniques that are used for service improvement, it is possible to identify how service improvement contributes to achieving the other attributes of a high performing, modern public service. In fact, service improvement can provide a practical laboratory in which to develop capacities that are required in each of the remaining five attributes. The following analysis shows how each of the remaining attributes of a modern, high performing public service are enhanced by the activities which are integral to service improvement initiatives

Sound Management of Public Resources

Sound management of public resources benefits from both the **planning and performing and measuring aspects** of service improvement initiatives. Planning for service improvement takes into account both strategic priorities and client needs. It therefore ensures that public resources are directed toward high impact initiatives. Service improvement is implemented through a set of project initiatives which have clear milestones and deliverables. This ensures that expenditure of public resources delivers results.

Corporate Management

Corporate management is promoted through service improvement activities which compel organizations to collaborate. Client-centric service delivery requires that services are delivered according to the needs of clients. This integrated service delivery approach leads to collaboration across organizations and a more corporate view of the public service. In addition, delivering services (**performing**) through integrated channels necessitates ministries and agencies working together. This results in employees seeing themselves as part of a single entity working toward a common goal or set of goals.

Strengthened Accountability

The client-centric focus (**listening**) of service improvement emphasizes accountability to clients as well as other stakeholders. **Setting service standards** and communicating them publicly is a

¹² Ibid, Page 8

cornerstone of service improvement. This enables the public to know what to expect and to hold to the public service accountable for achieving service standards. **Measuring results** of service improvement initiatives means that public servants are accountable for identifying outcomes of initiatives and for reporting on the extent to which intended outcomes are achieved.

**Maximizing the
Contribution
of every Public
Servant**

Service improvement recognizes the importance of sustained **leadership** for success. Emphasis is placed on engaging leadership and supporting them in their leadership role. Leadership skills developed through service improvement can be applied to other aspects of public service. Management capacity developed through service improvement governance and management raises the overall management capacity of the public service and is transferable. **Planning and implementation** skills required for service improvement, including strategic and operational planning, project management, business process improvement, change management and collaboration, contribute to the overall capacity of the public service, and can be used in many other contexts.

Engaged and motivated staff is a cornerstone of service improvement. Service improvement focuses on **changing culture** through staff training and development and encourages staff to contribute to the improvement of service delivery. Staff achievements are recognized through service improvement awards, and staff are encouraged to share experience and knowledge through a community of practice.

**Integrated
Information
Technology**

Technology is one of the key enablers of service improvement. **Performing** to meet client needs requires integrated services and channels which is supported by integrated technology. Integrated service improvement initiatives often provide the real business requirement that support the development of a common technology architecture and infrastructure. Service delivery initiatives also create the necessity to develop common data standards and security protocols.

Conclusion

Service improvement contributes directly to the development of a high performing public service. Service improvement initiatives are the cornerstone of a public service which focuses on results and quality service.

Service improvement also contributes to the other attributes of a high performing public service. It contributes to sound management of public resources through disciplined planning and rigorous project management to deliver results. It contributes to corporate management through its client-centric approach which requires ministries and agencies to work together to meet the needs of clients. Strengthened accountability is achieved by seeking and responding to client input, by setting standards and by measuring performance. Service improvement's focus on leadership and motivation and engagement of staff promotes maximizing the contribution of every public servant. And finally, the use of technology as an enabler of service improvement, and particularly the

use of technology to support integrated service delivery and integrated channels helps drive to an integrated technology environment.

For these reasons, service improvement must be a key element of any public sector modernization agenda.