

CHAPTER 5

STAFF RELATIONS AND STAFF MANAGEMENT IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

Personnel Administration at the central level

5.1 The Civil Service Branch is the Government's central personnel department. It consists of several divisions specialising in different areas such as pay and structure, appointments, staff housing, staff management and staff relations. Two divisions - the Staff Management Division and the Staff Relations Division, are of particular relevance to this study. The Staff Management Division develops service-wide strategies for improving staff management in the civil service and co-ordinates departmental efforts in this direction. The Staff Relations Division, on the other hand, ensures that appropriate staff consultative machineries and procedures are established and made use of effectively. It also provides an informal point of contact for both staff and departmental managements with the Civil Service Branch. We have several suggestions to make on the development of staff-management relations later on in this Chapter.

Personnel Administration at the Departmental Level

5.2 The responsibilities of Departments in the area of staff management include :-

- (a) deployment and career development ;
- (b) appraisal of staff performance ;
- (c) monitoring workload to achieve optimum utilisation of manpower ;
- (d) ensuring that all staff are aware of their entitlement to conditions of service such as leave, medical and dental facilities and housing benefits.

5.3 A number of departments have Directorate staff specifically in charge of administration and staff management duties, e.g. a Deputy Director (Administration) or an Assistant Director (Administration). However, the more usual pattern is for the Directorate officers to have their own schedule of operational or executive responsibilities, which means that staff management is only a part of the corporate responsibility of senior staff.

5.4 Often, day-to-day personnel matters like staff accommodation, training, leave and other conditions of service fall on the Departmental Secretary, who is supported by a team of executive and clerical staff.

Shortcomings of the existing arrangements

5.5 In the course of our deliberations, we have identified a number of shortcomings. Senior officers in some departments are more concerned with operational efficiency and the provision of services than the well-being of staff and often presume too much on staff goodwill. Departmental Secretaries are often hard pressed with day-to-day problems and may not have the time or the necessary authority to deal effectively with some staff problems. Furthermore, with the rapid growth and spread of the civil service, it is difficult to gauge the degree of success or failure of individual departments in staff management. Often deficiencies and negligence are discovered too late after a major issue has erupted - clearly an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

Suggested remedy - Staff Relations-Management Units

5.6 A special unit has recently been established in the Medical and Health Department to improve and develop staff relations. We see merit in this scheme and consider that there is scope for its extension to other large government departments. The main responsibilities of these "Staff Relations-Management Units" will be :-

- (a) to facilitate and improve formal departmental consultative procedures ;
- (b) to act as an efficient channel of communication between staff and management within the department ;
- (c) to provide the departmental management and staff with contact-points with the central Administration particularly on issues such as pay and conditions of service ;
- (d) to be responsible for the promotion of staff welfare, both collectively and in individual cases; and
- (e) to look into grievances and complaints from staff.

5.7 We recommend that consideration be given to extending the Medical and Health Department scheme to other large departments as a matter of priority. To render these units effective, we suggest that the officers in charge should be of sufficient standing, experience and seniority, preferably

at Directorate level, and should have an aptitude for personnel management. The activities of these departmental units should be co-ordinated and closely monitored at the central level by the Civil Service Branch, whose resources may have to be strengthened as it takes on new and additional responsibilities.

Training in Personnel Management

5.8 To enable these units to function properly and effectively, appropriate training in personnel management should be provided for their staff. We note that the Government already provides various types of management training for civil servants, both locally and overseas. Courses in management skills, instructional techniques, managerial effectiveness, and decision making have been organised by the Civil Service Training Division. The two Universities and the Hong Kong Polytechnic also offer courses in public administration or management studies. There are also courses on senior management available in a number of overseas institutions.

5.9 Despite the variety of training already provided for civil servants, we believe there is room for expansion, and we recommend that the Government should review its training resources and give priority in the allocation of such resources to supervisory and management training. The training of staff in personnel management should be developed as a continuing commitment by the Government. Finally, aptitude in personnel management should be an important factor in assessing the suitability of candidates for promotion to senior management appointments.

Informal Consultative Arrangements

5.10 Running parallel to the formal departmental consultative machinery, there exist in some departments other less formal arrangements whereby groups of staff or individual civil servants have access to the senior management. From the representations we have received, we realise that both staff and management value the existence of these additional channels, and that many heads of department recognise the need to extend and improve on the existing arrangements.

5.11 Here we would observe that staff feelings, grievances and aspirations usually manifest themselves first at the work-place, and a good and effective system of communication and information will do much to improve staff relations. We suggest that heads of department should take every opportunity to encourage their senior staff to be more accessible and approachable to their subordinates, by setting an example themselves. For example, senior management should

be more ready to discuss with individual officers matters which affect them directly, e.g. postings, training needs and career prospects. Such personal contacts form part of a good and effective staff consultation system.

5.12 To sum up, for the larger departments, we see merit in establishing special Staff Relations-Management Units to strengthen the management's capability in handling staff matters. For the smaller departments, we realise that it may be impracticable and unnecessary to establish such units and in these cases, we feel that departmental consultative councils and informal channels of communication described in paragraph 5.11 should be fully developed for the purpose of staff consultation.