



FEATURE ADDRESS BY

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MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MP FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

AT THE

SENSITIZATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMME IN INNOVATION FOR

THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

WEDNESDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2013



Ministry of
Public Administration

MAINSTREAMING INNOVATION

IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

SALUTATIONS

Ms Gillian Macintyre, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration

Other Permanent Secretaries and representative of the Chief Administrator of the Tobago House of Assembly

Deputy Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry of Public Administration

Other Deputy Permanent Secretaries

Chairman of CARIRI, Mr. Hayden Ferreira

Chairmen and Chief Executive Officers of Public Sector Organizations

Heads of Divisions and Departments

Members of staff of participating ministries and schools participating in the Certification programme

Facilitators and Members of staff of CARIRI

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

A quiet revolution has been taking place over the last two years here in the Public Service. It is based on our mission and overwhelming mandate to provide our citizens with the most accessible and highest quality service at the lowest cost and the least inconvenience.

In these two years we have begun the introduction of new technology that makes us accessible 24/7 and allows our stakeholders to avoid the delays and discomfort of travelling to Port-of-Spain for information or for services. For example, at the MPA's Scholarships Division, we have made all the information relating to scholarships and the application process itself much simpler and much more accessible. We can interview our candidates via Skype.

We have designed and are in the process of implementing a new public service architecture that will be more flexible and that will permit greater upward mobility, encourage entrepreneurship and foster enterprise, accountability and increased autonomy.

We have worked with many other Ministries and Departments to develop Service Charters that define what they expect of themselves and what their customers can expect from them. We have introduced the concept of shared services. A case in point is the sharing of services between the MPA and the Ministry of Communication and a pilot with Social Services.

Last year we launched our Gold to Diamond journey at a Gala event by identifying and recognising fifty public officers who contributed to the public service over the last fifty years. Through a mystery shopping exercise, several public service organisations who excelled in Service Delivery were identified and rewarded. This year we built on our initial effort and launched the Diamond Standard which will be one of the major vehicles of the transformation towards a citizen-centric public service, one in which the needs of the citizens of our country are paramount. Many of you here today were part of that launch in June of this year.

The fact that today we can initiate a Sensitization and Training Programme in Innovation for the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago is itself an innovation. This is why it is

with enormous pride in where we have come from as a public service and where we are heading that I welcome all of you here today.

I especially want to welcome those of you who were part of our historic launch of the Diamond Standard. You are the vanguard of the new and emerging public service that will not just continue the revolution that has started in the way we do business, but will take it to higher levels of achievement and accomplishment through innovation and creativity.

This morning, I want to thank CARIRI for agreeing to partner with us and I look forward to their support in building on the diversity already inherent in the public

service and the willingness to move forward with the transformation process.

CARIRI will tell you more about the tools they will use based on a process called “The Medici Effect” which seeks to bring together different disciplines, fields and cultures to develop and explore new ideas. Today, you will learn how to create that intersection point where many random combinations of ideas in the Public Service are possible, engendering the opportunity for that ‘click moment’.

The Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago is made up of different people and disciplines. We are a reflection of the diversity for which our country is famous – diversity in

races, religions, opinions, options and opportunities. This is a solid base on which to build our innovation drive.

Innovation depends on the ability to see things differently. Organisations like ours whose staff are diverse in terms of background and ways of thinking, and who bring together strongly contrasting disciplinary and professional perspectives, are more likely to be innovative than organisations that lack differentiation in people and approaches. I believe that how we seek out and foster innovation from all levels is crucial to continuous development and improvement.

I must confess, however, that I was disappointed but not surprised that Trinidad and Tobago is ranked 81 out of 142

countries in the 2013 Global Innovation Index. Trinidad and Tobago is a country that is renowned for its creativity and native genius and for our ability to improvise and invent, and yet we are in the middle of the table in the world and second in the Caribbean when it comes to innovation.

This is unacceptable and we have to look deep into ourselves and find opportunities even in the depths of disappointment and despair.

One of the keys to the future is something that we are already building on. We have been advocating for the public service to be perceived and to be managed as a business in the sense that it must deliver value for money. However, evident from

the research is that innovation in the public sector is not the same as innovation in the private sector.

Innovation in the private sector is related to profits and commercial success. This is not something that we can use as the test for innovation in the public sector even though there are state-enterprises that must be evaluated by that yardstick.

I see innovation as a core activity of the public sector. It helps public services to improve performance and increase public value. It makes us respond to the expectations of citizens and adapt to the needs of users and, at the same time, it forces us to increase service efficiency and minimize costs.

There are different views of what constitutes public service innovation. I prefer to deal with innovation in a pragmatic rather than a theoretical sense. For innovation to succeed it must be based on the creation and implementation of new processes, products, services and methods of delivery and result in significant improvements in efficiency, effectiveness or quality.

Innovation is not a single step flow. There are many pathways that we are already exploring. First, we are putting in place new or improved services such as what we are doing with the Diamond Certification Programme, with our recruitment policy, with the improved contract system for public servants, our emphasis on better outfitting and

facilities management, and in the newly formulated service charters.

Secondly, we have identified process innovations and this is something we are already facilitating with a number of other Ministries and Departments to see to what extent they can deliver better, faster and higher quality services with the minimum discomfort or disruption in the lives of our citizens.

Our diamond-shaped architecture is part of the administrative innovation that we have identified and want to build on. It is not the structure that is important but what it will encourage and the environment it will create – greater mobility opportunities, better decision making and increased

entrepreneurship while enhancing accountability, transparency and objectivity in the way we do business. We need to encourage more of these administrative innovations that will reduce the red-tape and bottlenecks. Most importantly, it creates an environment for creativity and innovation in the Public Service.

Right now we are working on the fourth area of innovation - system innovation. We are looking at new systems and fundamental changes in existing systems particularly in shared services where we are introducing new patterns of co-operation and interaction. We are particularly strong on the adoption and diffusion of new technologies, especially ICTs since they provide greater opportunities for wider innovation and for access to services.

The question then becomes, if innovation is so important, so necessary and so valuable to our public service and national development, why are we stuck in the middle of the global index? I believe that one of the hangovers of our colonial past is a culture of risk aversion that has become endemic. Many public servants, especially those at the highest levels, were punished for daring to decide on the basis of principle and not personality.

We have to change that culture, that particular mindset, and remove the barriers in the way of entrepreneurship, endeavor and innovation. As a Minister, I also know that we focus too much on short-term delivery and a lot of pressure is placed on the people and the systems for “now-for-now” results.

At the same time we need to reduce the layers of bureaucracy and the hierarchical systems inherited from the colonial structures of 1962 which makes innovation impossible. The authority to innovate and be supportive of that structure are critical. An objective of the design of the new Diamond Structure is to ensure that the entire public service is able to participate in and contribute to the innovation that is necessary to achieve the Diamond standard.

This morning, I was having a discussion with the Chairman of CARIRI and I mentioned that whereas in the past we heard of incubators for innovation, in this situation, I would like us to treat with the Public Service being an entire platform for innovation. Not as incubators in special spaces,

but the entire space of the public service being created for innovation

We know our structure and processes can also stifle innovation. Our performance appraisal system tends to be punitive and not developmental. The lack of encouragement and rewards on the one hand, and the fear of failure on the other, make innovation difficult. We cannot be afraid of failure, we cannot escape the process of trial and error. In fact, if we are to be innovative, there must be failures otherwise there would be no learnings which come out of these failures. If there are no failures there will be no innovation.

At the same time, I want to ensure that no one leaves today's session thinking that the Minister of Public Administration

has said it is ok to fail. I want to put this into the context as espoused in the book by Frans Johansson: The Medici Effect- What Elephants & Epidemics Can Teach Us About Innovation.

- *“Make sure people are aware that failure to execute ideas is the greatest failure.*
- *Make sure everyone learns from past failures, do **not** reward the same mistakes over and over again*
- *If people show low failure rates, be suspicious. Maybe they are not taking enough risks, or maybe they are hiding their mistakes, rather than allowing others in the organization to learn from them*
- *Hire people who have had intelligent failures and let others in the organization know that’s one reason they were hired”*

So please take note that what I am saying is where there are failures, we need to ensure that people are not repeating mistakes that we are already aware of.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we have a culture of hiding our failures, not understanding that the lessons from those failures can lead to innovation in another area. Because of our culture, this topic on how we deal with failure is a very important area for the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago.

I also know that we have serious concerns in the Public Sector, because whereas Private Sector does not have to face reputational risk, we have to face reputational risk because of

the scrutiny that the Public Service faces through the Joint Select Committees of Parliament, and the public at large. This type of scrutiny may make us averse to risk, because of the reputational risk.

However, this can be part of an educational exercise. When you go before a Joint Select Committee you are able to educate how a meaningful failure played a role in the process leading towards an innovation.

Whereas the Australian Government identified five areas of importance in the Public Service, we have identified two of these five areas that are important for us to build into the Diamond Structure that platform for innovation. These areas

are Effective; Leadership and Organizational Flexibility and Agility

Leadership is important, since without leadership through all levels of the organization, there can be no innovation. One of the things we have identified at the MPA as we develop the White Paper is that horizontal axis, versus the vertical axis, because we continue to operate in those silos. Very important is leadership from the top-down all through the levels especially in middle management. Effective leadership must throughout your organization at all levels to provide that environment for innovation.

In addition, our leaders themselves must be brave enough and self-confident enough not to see every new idea as a

challenge to their leadership. They have to accept that we are in the era of cross-disciplinary, multi-functional teams.

Separate from leadership is the development of the managerial skills to manage these diverse teams. The international consensus is that we have all kinds of technical and technological specialisations but what we lack are managers who understand their roles in this new era.

The importance of this is underscored by Johansson when he states:

*“Simply bringing people together from different disciplines and cultures, with varied thinking styles, different values, and diverse attitudes, is **not** the same as putting together an innovative team. Basic problematic*

group dynamics will work against you unless the group is managed appropriately.”

The old rules of being on the job from 8 to 4 cannot work in the age of ICTs. Even the jobs have changed. We have to use innovation to create environments that stimulate, support and sustain innovation.

This is why our outfitting policy is designed to provide environments for greater team work and to allow for cross-functional, multi-disciplinary teams. Why? It is in order to break down the associative barriers that the Medici has ascribed to.

Radical or transformational innovation in particular requires an organizational flexibility and agility in being able to shift and obtain the necessary skills and resources to meet new or emerging needs and opportunities.

Our working environment must allow for independent units of work which allow for autonomy and empowerment in the organization. Innovation cannot flourish in these hierarchical structures with a command and control environment.

Of importance is the establishment of task forces, working steering committees, and internal and external networks. In fact the MPA has also launched the concept of Communities of Practice across the Public Service to strengthen the internal network. Collaboration with external stakeholders is

important for innovation. For those of you involved in the Diamond Certification process, you would note the importance of the different forms of consultation with users including user panels, towards user driven innovation.

At the macro or national level, we know that competitiveness and innovation can be facilitated or hampered by the approach of the public service.

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2013 came out today, and it is reported that Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 92 out of 148 countries. This represents a decline in our ranking of eight positions from 84 out of 144 countries in 2012.

If we are still deep in red tape and dependent on multiple carbon copies of files then our suppliers will not invest in paperless offices. The Chairman this morning spoke of the pervasiveness of the public service. If the public service does not get involved using ICTs the Private sector has no incentive to do so. If we talk *egovernment* but we are stuck in the past, those who provide us with goods and services will also be stuck in the past. If the public service is not innovative then it is useless to believe that the private sector can be innovative.

The Prime Minister, in launching the Journey From Gold To Diamond last year, made the very telling point that the transformation of the public service requires and, in fact, demands the transformation of the entire country. This is

true. We in the public sector have to be the catalyst for innovation in all the other sectors, especially the private sector. This is the only way we can improve our global ranking.

So where do we go from here?

We are looking at successful innovations or putting good ideas to work. When we do that, we add value to our organization. It creates synergy and energy. It can ignite and inspire.

This is my challenge to you, all Ministries and Agencies here today and our CARIRI partners. I want us to design and implement the “MPA Public Service Transformation

Innovation Challenge”. It will be open to all public servants and to all citizens. Anyone, who has a great idea with the power to improve our service delivery or make us more citizen-centric will be able to enter.

As we did for the Service Delivery Awards last year, we will put together a totally independent panel that will help us to identify those suggestions which are workable and which will help us to achieve and even expand the perspectives of the Diamond Standard faster and better.

I want to see the journey from Gold To Diamond paved with the innovative inputs from all of us. I want to see how our innovativeness in the public service can put us where we

belong, higher up the global ladder of innovation and on the Global Competiveness Index.

If necessity is the mother of invention, creativity is the mother of innovation and there is no more innovative society in the world than Trinidad and Tobago. The Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago is a microcosm of that society. We have the people, we have the talent and we will now have an incentive.

I thank you.