



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of
the National Academy of Public Administration,
and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,
Princeton University*

Oral History Program

Series: Civil Service
Interview no.: N3

Interviewee: Lisa Cleary
Interviewer: David Hausman
Date of Interview: 9 September 2009
Location: Solomon Islands

Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA
www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties

HAUSMAN: This is David Hausman and I'm here on September 9, 2009 with Lisa Cleary at the Public Service Improvement Program (PSIP) at the Ministry of Public Service in Honiara in the Solomon Islands. Ms. Cleary have you consented to be recorded for this interview?

CLEARY: Yes, thank you yes.

HAUSMAN: Okay, thanks so much. I wanted to start by asking you about your own experience and what jobs brought you to this position?

CLEARY: *Okay, my own experience, I come from Brisbane in Australia. I worked for fourteen years in the correctional service in Queensland, Australia, mostly in the corporate services, human resources (HR) area of that organization. The job that brought me to the Solomons was actually as a human resource advisor position in the correction service of the Solomon Islands. So I arrived in the Solomons in August 2006. I've been here for three years now. I spent the first 2-1/2 years in the Solomons working in the correctional service as a human resources advisor predominantly at the human resource strengthening program for the corrections program. Then in March this year, so March 2009 I transferred across programs and came from corrections into the public service improvement program as a human resources advisor still but in a much broader capacity because we're, of course, looking across the entire public service in this program rather than one ministry, or one work area.*

HAUSMAN: Great. I wonder if I could ask you a few questions about the goals and motivation of the PSIP. I know that, I guess it started before you came to it, but what would you say were the issues and challenges facing the civil service before the reforms got started?

CLEARY: *Essentially during the ethnic tensions period, as you know law and order broke down so functions like the police and prison services were not operating. There was a lot of civil unrest and that sort of behavior going on. Alongside that machinery of government functions had also broken down so things like the finances were being ripped out of the budget area. The Ministry of Public Service processes had broken down completely. Merit-based recruitment wasn't happening. People were intimidating others to get promotions and all those sorts of things. So in an HR sense those were the types of things that were happening.*

The Public Service Improvement Program comes in a fair bit behind the beginning of RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission for the Solomon Islands) because RAMSI started up in 2003 and this program really only got off the ground last year, in say 2008. More so only this year with the recruitment of advisors like myself to come in and work in particular areas. So some of what has happened is that as the RAMSI program came in and—you know, I was saying that I worked in corrections before I came here, well, I think what started to happen was that there had been a focus on human resource improvement in individual ministries or work areas of the public service and yet the central agency had somewhat been left behind. So the Ministry of Public Service and the Public Service Commission weren't, I don't believe, being carried along with that sort of improvement that was going on.

There were particular advisor inputs where people came in and did, you know, a situational analysis and left a report and off they went, but the follow-up just didn't seem to occur. So this program is really the beginning of trying to strengthen the core HR functions across the public service. The program itself is underpinned with the background or the knowledge that effective human resource

management and practices is fundamental to strengthening public service reform, achieving public service reform.

So many of the issues that are on our agenda like performance management, merit-based recruitment, improving employment opportunities for women, other conditions of employment, legislative framework for employment, and the list goes on, they're all fundamental to building a strong machinery of government.

HAUSMAN: Can you describe some of those goals, some of the specific goals in more detail?

CLEARY: *Okay, well if I think about the work that I'm doing at the moment, and the first job that I'm sort of focusing on is the development of a human resource strategic plan. So our approach is that we know there are lots of things that need to be done, but before we go off and do all of those things, we need to have a planned approach. So we're trying to gather some data to support the development of a human resource strategic plan. That's difficult because there's no HR IS (Information Systems) or no information system as we would know it in Western jurisdictions. They've been managing with establishments and workforce planning activities on Excel spreadsheets and they've been tampered with and adjusted and not managed or controlled very well. So there are issues there.*

But in terms of capturing data about things like turnover rates and your skills database and things like that, we just don't have that information except on a very ad hoc basis. So one of the first things that we did was conduct a human resource survey across every ministry, so 24 ministries and four large work places here. We asked them questions about a whole range of HR functions, including the capacity of HR staff working in ministries, how many dedicated resources they had too. Are you happy with recruitment and selection processes? Are you doing performance management, etc. So that was the first thing.

We feel like now that we've got a bit of a baseline to inform the development of further future work that we do. So that led us into then moving along with the HR planning process. The way that we're going about that is that I as the advisor and working with a team of local HR managers to build their capacity or work with them in building an HR strategic plan for the Solomon Islands. Now we're only in the early days of that process, maybe halfway through so we've been doing a lot of activities like environmental scanning and SWOT [Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats] analyses and stakeholder analyses and that sort of thing, before we start the actual planning template I suppose you'd say. So that's really where we're at. I'm sort of about seven or eight months into a twelve-month contract here. So that's been the focus of my first sort of seven or eight months here. It is about having a strategically-planned approach to the things that need to be done and in what sort of priority order, and in turn go from there.

So with that sort of in an ad hoc way trying to fix all the things that are broken, we're just trying to do it in a way that's got a bit of structure and organization about it.

HAUSMAN: I know you're only partway through the process, but what priorities have you decided on so far?

CLEARY: *Well, there are things like human resource information system. So we have a short-term advisor in this program now helping us with that because that has been identified as an early priority. A new payroll system is up and running, it is called E-run and it has HR modules that have already been purchased so we can*

be tapping into those. So what we're doing at the moment is trying to map what is currently happening with workforce budgeting and establishment management and what needs to happen for us to be able to link into that program. That's really important because without data it is very difficult to predict, forecast, plan, all those things. So that's one thing that has been identified as a priority and we're working on already.

Recruitment and selection is another. So when we did our survey 97% of workplaces said yes, we've all got the process and the forms and we know what to do. At the other end, 2% said they were happy with the length of time that it takes to progress an appointment. It can take months, or years. So that tells us there's a big problem in the middle there, doesn't it. So another short-term advisor has come in to map what's the story in between. What's happening in the middle? Why is it taking so long, what can we fix now and what needs legislative change or policy change or whatever.

The third one is a review of what we call schemes of service. Now schemes of service are similar to what you or I might call like a collective bargaining agreement or an enterprise agreement. So different professions or cadres of workers have these agreements and they're all different and there's no logic or structure to any of them. Some appear to have been politically motivated and staff in particular professions are receiving these outrageous allowances that see them being paid more than very, very senior public servants whereas others have been developed more as like a progression tool, linking progression to development and that sort of thing which is what we'd much prefer to see. They could be models for the right way to do it.

But that's a big problem. It has created huge inequities in the salary structure across the public service. There's no job evaluation system so there's no consistent way of determining the value or level of jobs in public service so that's another thing that will fall out of this review. So those are three priority areas that we're working on sort of simultaneously. They'll be part of the HR plan as well, the things that we can start doing some initial scoping work to try and find out exactly what it is that we might need to do in those areas. That's a long-winded way of probably answering your question.

HAUSMAN: That's great. How does this planning process relate to the earlier planning process that I heard about that was kind of a consultative process.

CLEARY: Yes.

HAUSMAN: I guess relatively soon after RAMSI arrived on how to—which I guess led to the Machinery of Government program, is that right?

CLEARY: Yes, or you could be referring to the PSIP design itself.

HAUSMAN: Right, I think so. Is this—?

CLEARY: *Yes, it goes back some time. It would be, gosh, it could have even been 2006, something like that. The planning process for the PSIP commenced and there were a number of consultative workshops held across town involving Permanent Secretaries, Under Secretaries, Provincial Secretaries and a range of other people. The information that came out of those workshops really was used to inform the development of the design for the public service improvement program. That design document is really what steers or guides people like me in our jobs. That's, for example, where the need for strategic human resource plan*

is identified. That's seen as being important. So it's not me that comes in and makes up this whole notion that we need an HR strategic plan, it's part of the design process for this program. So Solomon Islanders certainly had input to that process.

HAUSMAN: Let me ask you now about a few specific aspects of the reforms and of the current state of the civil service here. Could you describe the procedures and standards currently used in the system of recruitment?

CLEARY: *Yes, okay, what you have—maybe I should—. If I go to the employment condition or the legislative framework for employment you've got here, the highest law of the land, which is the constitution and that dabbles in some areas in issues relating to recruitment selection, more from a perspective of delegations, particular people to a point, to a certain level and things like that.*

Then you've got from our perspective the Public Service Act. That is an extraordinary piece of legislation. It is more about—it makes more general rules about things like how much fuel particular post holders can put in their vehicles and things like this. So it is not what we would expect to see in that type of legislation. Then you have the Public Service Commission regulations. They are used here more like a Public Service Act might be in other jurisdictions. But it is fairly process-y. It gets down to quite a level of process those regulations, because there's nothing else.

Then you have the general orders and the general orders are what we could describe as human resource and other administrative policies. There are issues about them being followed, but they're there. They were developed during colonial times. They've been reviewed from time to time, but I'd suggest only at face value and not really in any in-depth way. In terms of context, a lot of the policies probably are not appropriate or relevant within the Solomon Islands' context and they need to be updated.

Then that's it, that's where it ends at the moment. There is another layer that needs to go in there and that's what we'll call an HR and Administrative Procedures manual, a toolkit for HR managers, the how to in terms of implementing policy. That will be one of the projects that we'll work on here.

HAUSMAN: To what extent are these procedures followed in practice?

CLEARY: *As suited. So if there is a benefit for me in terms of following the general orders, then I'll follow them but if there's not, then I won't. In some cases there are policies, particularly in the areas of housing for example that the government simply cannot afford to implement. They can't honor their policy commitments in relation to housing for example.*

In terms of recruitment and selection the general orders say very little about recruitment selection. In 2006 there was an advisor who came in to work in the Ministry of Public Service on recruitment and selection and a comprehensive recruitment and selection package was developed. It included a whole range of forms and a policy document. It is quite good. There are about fourteen steps involved in from, say, advertising a post to filling it, to getting an appointment. That may have been the way it needed to be at that point. That's what we're reviewing at the moment that process basically.

But again, it is sort of selectively used I would suggest and we're sort of quickly discovering for example that there is an opportunity in there to use something

that they call accelerated promotion which essentially is promoting someone without a merit process and it seems that there is quite a bit of that going on.

HAUSMAN: Is there any enforcement process for merit-based recruitment?

CLEARY: *Yes, there is. At the moment the delegations for appointments in the public service rest with the commission in most cases. So most appointments have to come through, even for base-grade appointment, have to be approved by the Public Service Commission. Now there are some agencies like police and corrections that have exemptions to that and they can appoint—the commissions of those organizations can appoint up to a certain level. But in general the commission appoints. There are other levels of scrutiny in there as well with the Permanent Secretaries to the relevant ministry being required to sign off on the process and all this sort of thing.*

Again it seems that there could be policies there but they're not being followed, or perhaps they're not understood. I'm not sure. But clearly the commission for example is approving accelerated promotions and we don't think there's any legislative basis for them to do that, in fact we say their regulations say they can't do that because they say that all appointments have to be on the basis of merit or competitive I think is the word that's used. Does this sound confusing or making sense?

HAUSMAN: No, it's great.

CLEARY: *It is a bit confusing.*

HAUSMAN: What criteria I guess formally are used in promotions? What weighting is given to things like seniority, education and skills?

CLEARY: *My own assessment would be that promotion here is still very much happening on the basis of seniority. That is partially cultural. The Solomon Islands is finding it extremely difficult to move out of that mode of recruitment. My own experience has been that there is a real sort of sense of—people would have been in the job a long time, whether they're performing well or not. If they've been there a long time they deserve the promotion. There seems to me to be a great amount of discomfort around not doing that but promoting a junior person over an older person is something that decision makers here are very uncomfortable with. They don't like doing it.*

HAUSMAN: How does that fit with the practice of accelerated promotion?

CLEARY: *Accelerated promotion sits outside of all of that. There is no merit-based process at all for that. You fill in a form, it's just a form, PS form 28 let's say. Put in the person's name, which post and why and then you attach another form that might be called something like Confidential Report Form or something, that's sort of a tick and flick form about performance. Has the person performed well—yes. All those things. Fill it in and say yes, yes, yes to everything, whether it is true or not and that's how it happens.*

HAUSMAN: A lot of places there's actually a market for civil service positions, is that true here at all?

CLEARY: *In some areas. Because the unemployment rate is so high here, any job is coveted. For example, when we were in corrections and we advertised for new recruits there we had something like forty positions and we had 1500 applicants*

from across the Solomons, mostly young people looking for work, a few older ones. Similar stories if you go across agency. Any of those posts, particularly the unskilled posts where you don't require a tertiary qualification for example. You're getting massive amounts of applicants for those sorts of posts. Skilled shortages definitely in terms of skilled posts like accountants and lawyers and doctors and all those typical professions. They're just examples.

HAUSMAN: Could you say a bit more about the new recruitment program recommended by the advisor from 2006 and what the results of that had been?

CLEARY: *Well, it's interesting because the process itself is very detailed, it's very well written. It was issued in 2006 and from our survey tells us everyone has that and everyone says they know how to use it. Is that still appropriate in 2009/2010? Probably not. I would suggest that that process was created in a time or an era of great mistrust, so there are still very low levels of trust in even Permanent Secretaries, high-ranking officers. So things like delegations, delegating low-level appointments for example from the commission to the Permanent Secretaries or heads of agencies may not have been appropriate then, but in terms of speeding up recruitment processes it could well be appropriate now. So there are things like that.*

HAUSMAN: Are there any other examples of things like that that come to mind?

CLEARY: *Like what?*

HAUSMAN: That may have been appropriate then but are no longer appropriate now?

CLEARY: *Yes. Well, if I think about the recruitment selection process in general, it is very Western. We have, we develop job descriptions with criteria, a set of criteria in there. We require a person to provide a written application, reference, a resume, all that sort of thing. Then we require people to come and sit at an interview in front of three or four panel members. Typically what we'd see in a Western jurisdiction. Is that appropriate for the Solomon Islands? I don't know. I'm not sure that it is.*

Because if you're a young person, or any person from one of the remote provincial areas, surely you've got an equal right to apply for a job just like anyone else if you've got the qualifications, or in some cases you don't need qualifications. But, you have not been exposed to that sort of process. You don't have computers. You might not even have paper to write an application on. Certainly don't know how to put a resume together because no one has ever shown you how. Then in terms of this culture you'd have to come and sit in front of four big men and probably be too terrified to say anything.

So one of the things that I'm asking our HR managers' group to think about when we're doing strategic HR planning is: is that the system for the Solomon Islands or is there a better way. I don't know. Those are the sorts of philosophical, fundamental things that we're challenging as part of this process and thinking about.

HAUSMAN: Thanks. Let me ask you a bit about performance management. One of the—

CLEARY: *That's why we're here.*

HAUSMAN: Which is of course one of the big challenges in lots of civil services.

CLEARY: *It is.*

HAUSMAN: How do performance evaluations work now and have any changes been made recently?

CLEARY: *Okay, at the moment I would say that they're not working, that they're not being done in general. There may be little pockets of areas perhaps that have had advice or support where they're occurring but in general I'd say that they're not occurring. Is that much different to what I've seen in Western jurisdictions that I've worked in? No, not actually. I mean I didn't do a performance review for the 14 years that I worked in corrections in Queensland public service. There's a process. The general orders has a process for doing—well, I guess let's make the distinction between performance management and performance appraisal first. That might be useful.*

I think of performance management as a holistic system that links into other key HR strategies like say reward and recognition and recruitment and promotion and career development. That does not happen here in any sense. There is nothing integrated about the approach. What we have here is an annual performance appraisal system. So it is a form, it's your standard old performance appraisal form. You know, Staff Form 10 or something like that it is called. That's supposed to be filled in on an annual basis. It was developed during the colonial era. They were manually typed on the files, typewriters, the English were here. But that has completely fallen over. The only reason they're done, if they're done, is so that people can get an increment because they're linked to increments. You have to fill in Staff Form 10 to get your increment, your pay raise. So if they occur, that's why.

HAUSMAN: You touched on this a bit already, but who is responsible for the appointments and promotion decisions?

CLEARY: *Okay, in general, across the public service, if we're talking about a merit-based or a competitive process, then you will have a panel that will form and do all the usual things that panels do and they'll make a recommendation. The recommendation will go to the Permanent Secretary or head of agency for that work area. Then that has to come into the Ministry of Public Service who then performs this like Secretariat function for the commission. So they check all the forms to make sure they're being filled in correctly and all this sort of thing. Then they go down to the commission and the commission sits once a week to make decisions about a range of issues including appointments. Discipline is another one.*

HAUSMAN: How do promotion decisions work, is it the same process?

CLEARY: *Same, unless it is an accelerated promotion. Then there is no merit-based process. It is just fill in a form, get the PS to sign it or the head of agency and then the same, it comes through the Ministry of Public Service, the vetting, and then off to the commission for the approval or the decision.*

HAUSMAN: What is the role of the ministers of themselves in this process?

CLEARY: *None really.*

HAUSMAN: Do you think it works that way in practice?

CLEARY: *No. I haven't seen it myself. But certainly local people tell me that the recruitment and selection process is politically influenced. There are cases of ministers telephoning panel members or heads of agencies and saying this person will have the job. If that happens then the instructions are followed. There seems to be no ability to say no to a minister if that happens.*

HAUSMAN: Before I go onto some of the other areas, you mentioned before that in the first stage of RAMSI before the formation of the Public Service Improvement Program that there were kind of decentralized attempts to make HR improvements in individual agencies.

CLEARY: Yes.

HAUSMAN: Could you describe some of those maybe and maybe some of the successes and non-successes?

CLEARY: *If I think about the corrections program which is where I worked for example, and police also had a human resources advisor from an early stage and some of the others had too, what I observed in there was that we were getting to a point in some of those agencies where we were doing some of the more strategic HR activities like trying to develop a workforce plan in terms of trying to predict what the future needs of our workforce would be and what sorts of skills we might need and that sort of thing.*

We were trying to implement our own learning and development strategies. We were trying to get some focus on key HR initiatives like performance management and housing policy and those sorts of things. But we were very much doing it in isolation. So what was happening is it was just a corrections initiative; it wasn't a public service initiative. My experience was that it was really really difficult to achieve any change in the sense of making processes more accountable and more transparent. Because if you're a corrections officer, you'll simply say that's not fair, no one else has to do that so why should we. Everyone else claims that allowance so we're not missing out. So from that perspective it was really difficult. Whereas if the change is being promoted from the central agency as policy and you all shall do this, and then you can, I think it is an easier way to influence change. It might not work, I don't know, but it's probably got a better chance than trying to approach it individually.

HAUSMAN: Let me ask you a bit about the Public Service Commission now. It has already come up. Could you describe the Public Service Commission and its structure and history?

CLEARY: *I can. It is a bit odd. When I say it is a bit odd, the structure is different to what you will see anywhere else including other Pacific Island regions in that we have a Ministry of Public Service. So that's different for a start. Most jurisdictions have a Public Service Commission, that's the central body. Here we have a Ministry of Public Service and then as arms of the Ministry of Public Service we have the commission and then IPAM (Institute of Public Administration and Management). IPAM is the Institute of—.*

HAUSMAN: Public Administration and Management?

CLEARY: *Yes, thank you for that. So they operate out of the Ministry of Public Service. The commission is geographically isolated from this building. I mean we're not talking a hundred miles away but they're in a different location. So in terms of being*

integrated with the staff here for example, it is quite separate. We're trying to change that but it is fairly separate at the moment.

The Ministry, from what I can gather, is basically performing a Secretariat function for the commission and the commission just gets wads and wads and wads of paperwork and files. Everything comes in great wads like big piles of paper and files and they sit and they make decisions. The commission is made up of—there's a chairman. The commission itself is established under the constitution of the Solomon Islands. So that's where it is established. Then the Public Service Commission regulations are basically the rules of the commission if you'd like. They form the basis upon which they make their decisions. So, for example, they outline all the things that must have happened in a disciplined process for them to agree with the decision.

Because they're fairly process oriented like that, as I was saying before, they've actually become more like a policy document for HR managers to use. They sort of go into more detail than the general orders in some areas. The commission, so the constitution says that the commission would be made up of a chairman and no less than two or no more than four commissioners. At the moment they've got a couple of vacancies on the commission because there have been some resignations and movement. So I think at the moment there's two men and two women and they've got two vacancies.

The role of the commission is to make decisions about, at the moment, appointments, discipline, promotions and that's pretty much it.

HAUSMAN: How does that function in practice? Does it make decisions promptly?

CLEARY: *I guess I should say—I should clarify here. There are actually three separate commissions. I forgot that bit actually didn't I. There's four really. There is the Public Service Commission, so it sits—it's the same people mind you. The different commissions are the same people, the same commissioners, but they have different roles. So the Public Service Commission hears decisions about most of the public service agencies, except police and prisons have their own commission. It's called the Police and Prisons Commission. That commission sits just to hear matters relating to the police and corrections services promotions. They do hear appeals so in those discipline services they have powers to discipline and if officers are not happy with the result of that panel they can make an appeal to the commission. So they have an appeal role in that sense and I think they have the same in the Public Service Commission as well.*

Then you have the Legal and Justice—sorry, the Justice and Legal Services Commission. That commission sits to appoint lawyers and magistrates and people working in the legal professions. Then we have the Teachers Commission. They're a bit separate. They are, I think they are made up of different people to these other three commissions. Of course they just appoint teachers.

The Public Service Commission sits regularly so it sits every Wednesday because of course it has by far the most business because it hears every other agency except the legals and the police and corrections. The Police and Prisons Commission—well the other two commissions that I mentioned there meet on an as-required basis. As required for this purpose means when they've got enough business to warrant a sitting. So what that means is that if you're in corrections and you're wanting to put a submission in for an appointment and that's the only submission there, at that point in time you could have to wait three months for the

commission to sit, until it has enough business to sit. Then you wait another couple of months for the decision to come out. By the time the decision is made, then it comes back to the public service so that they can do the appointment later. Then it goes back to the Ministry for Corrections so that they can do whatever they do with it and then eventually it gets back out to corrections.

HAUSMAN: How long does that process generally take for the normal public service appointments?

CLEARY: *Well we're finding anywhere between say two months and eight months.*

HAUSMAN: Even for the appointments where the commission sits once a week?

CLEARY: *Yes, it is because the process—there are so many steps in the recruitment process. So it starts out in the local workplace. So let's say if you're in the public solicitor's office for example, your recruitment process, lovely, then you have to send it off to your ministry, the Ministry of Justice so that the Permanent Secretary can sign off. But it could sit in there for three months because if a particular person is on leave, or the Permanent Secretary is overseas or on leave or anything else, it will sit. It will sit and sit and sit for months. Then once he signed off on it, it comes to the Ministry of Public Service.*

When it comes to the Ministry of Public Service, they do a few little bits. It goes to the establishment person to check that there is a vacancy on the establishment. It goes to the registry people and they run off and find a hard—you know a personnel file because the commission won't accept any submission without a personnel file coming with it. There's one other thing—I think someone here, a delegate has to sign off that the forms have been filled in correctly, so it is the vetting process. That can take months because we're finding that what is happening is that the registry, for example, might not be able to find a file. So this piece of paper goes and sits on the floor, on the pile and it could sit there for a year until somebody says, what happened to that paper? Papers are lost. There's a lot of lost paperwork and it is because, again, through so many steps into so many entries, the opportunities for things to be lost are just unbelievable. The opportunities for corruption or interference because there're so many steps are increased. You get my appointment very quickly and I'll give you a hundred dollars, that sort of thing.

HAUSMAN: How effectively is the independence of the public service tested?

CLEARY: *That's hard. My feeling is that at this point in time - we're talking about the Ministry of the Public Service?*

HAUSMAN: I guess so since that's under the commission.

CLEARY: *I think at this point in time it would be fair to say that the Ministry of Public Service does not have credibility across the sector. My survey said that 1% of ministries, it might have been 3% because it was one workplace, said that they would approach the Ministry of Public Service if they had an issue or problem that they wanted to talk about. So that's a fairly significant indicator or thought.*

The commission I don't think is viewed in the same way. I think that the commission is viewed with a degree of respect and independence. I think that is partially due to the past commissioner who has just finished his six-year term.

HAUSMAN: Is that Edmund Andresen?

CLEARY: *Yes. He is highly regarded and there's a lot of respect for that man so for that reason I think the commission had quite a bit of credibility and would have been seen as fairly independent.*

HAUSMAN: Great. Have there been any changes to the commission as part of the reforms since—?

CLEARY: *Not yet, no. One of the things that we're doing, and I've sort of started to do a bit of work on it before I got sidetracked onto other things, is looking at the roles and responsibilities of the core agencies in relation to human resource management. Particularly the structure of the commission and ministry and that sort of things. For example, the Solomon Islands government will need to make some policy decisions about things like do we really want to run four separate commissions or should they be merged into one state services commission?*

Even more broadly than that, should the commission and the Ministry of Public Service be separate entities or should it be one body, as Solomon Islands Public Service Commission, similar to what you'd see in every other jurisdiction. So some of these issues have been borne out early and have been put on the table for the politicians to think about because at the end of the day they are Solomon Islands policy decisions that must be made. It will be interesting to see what they decide because in terms of financial efficiency there's probably not a lot to be gained from merging them, although there certainly needs to be reviews of organizational structures and things like that, but in terms of processing efficiency, it would probably be much better for organizations like corrections and police if they had regular sittings.

HAUSMAN: Lots of countries have big problems with the size of their civil services and difficulties in reducing it. Have there been efforts to reduce the size of the civil service here and could you describe it?

CLEARY: *I don't know a lot about them but yes, the answer to your question is yes, there have been efforts. It may have been around 2004, 2005. There was certainly a fairly significant effort. Interestingly the reason for this program, it is called the Public Service Improvement Program and not the public sector reform program is because Solomon Islanders have a very strong perception about the word reform and that reform equals redundancy because past public sector reforms that they've seen here have been redundancy programs and not about anything else other than that. So the naming of this program was strategic in that sense.*

I think it was the ADB, the Asian Development Bank, that ran a fairly significant program at one point and they did manage to reduce the number of public servants. I probably couldn't comment more than that. There are reports and things around but I can't quote the figures and whatnot off the top of my head. There have been other attempts as well before that. Our program is not about redundancies, it is not about reducing the size of the public service although this is a ten-year program and we're second year in. That's not to say that at some point we won't be doing reviews of organizations' structures and ministries on the basis of functions, you know, what functions do you need to perform and then what skills and what people do you need to do that. It's not to say that there wouldn't be some sort of downsizing.

HAUSMAN: Let me ask you now about pay policy. The cost of civil service wages is often a major problem. Could you talk about any major changes that have been made to pay policy recently? I guess including allowances such as housing?

CLEARY: *Okay, there are a few things. I'm just trying to think in my mind where to start. Until recently, so the new E-run payroll system has just come in. Now the most fundamental thing that that system does or requires is a linkage between post and people. So this issue about ghosts on payroll, you know people getting paid that don't have a position and all this sort of thing, it tries to eliminate that. Yes, there have been some concerns in that area but probably not as bad as what we might see in some other country.*

The problem we have here is what they commonly call political appointees. So they're people who are—this is where the political influence comes into recruitment. So people are appointed by ministers, given a job by ministers. They're paid salaries that are not within the public service salary structure and essentially they don't have any post, they don't have an established post. Now the new system stops that from happening or should stop that from happening. So that's the first thing, it really tightens up your workforce budgeting because it won't pay anyone that doesn't have a post. So that's a major policy change, really.

HAUSMAN: The people who were appointed without posts, would they not have gone through the regular recruitment process either?

CLEARY: *In most cases no.*

HAUSMAN: How common was that?

CLEARY: *Well because the government of the day might be, you know, Wantoks [from 'one talk', referring to those who speak the same language], you've heard that term? So there might be wantoks or family or friends of ministers, or other senior ranking public servants. They say give this person a job. They'll call it a name, they'll say okay, give this person a job as the advisor of policy and pay them this much fortnight. That's what happens. We've very recently had a case where someone working on the new payroll system was saying to us that they identified—they were trying to clean up the systems, they're reconciling at the moment going through this process of getting every ministry to reconcile their budget with their establishment, they identified a person that didn't have an established post. They went to the ministry and said you know, what's happening? The instruction that came back from the Permanent Secretary was forget about it, just pay them.*

Now the amount was really over and above what any normal public servant would get. It was highlighted that the person had not been at work for the past five weeks or something and yet the instruction still came: you will pay them and you will not ask any questions.

HAUSMAN: What happened in the end of that case?

CLEARY: *I don't know, I haven't heard the end to that story yet. We're hoping that they've referred the matter on to either this ministry, to our Permanent Secretary or to the Leadership Code Commission because that's corruption.*

HAUSMAN: Right. How do civil service wages here compare to those in the private sector?

CLEARY: *Not good. For example a lot of the really bright graduates here are working in the donor programs. There's a lot of competition with the donor programs. I want to work for AusAID or EU or whoever and it is because their salaries are much*

more attractive. I know this because I've asked people who work for them and why they work for them and not the public service. So that's a problem. Some of the other large private sector employers like Telecom and Solomon Tobacco and Palm Oil also have better employment conditions. The things that are attractive to people here are houses, they all want houses and of course money.

HAUSMAN: I understand that one of the attractions of the public service is the provision of housing.

CLEARY: *It used to be, yes.*

HAUSMAN: And that there has been a large effort to reform the provision of government housing. Could you say a bit more about that?

CLEARY: *Yes, okay. Housing as an issue of the government in my view is probably the largest or one of the largest issues confronting the government of the Solomon Islands and it is very, very different and you have to think about it very, very differently to what we do in Western jurisdictions as well where typically we've seen governments offload housing. So houses that were once government owned and you'd go—certainly in Australia anyway, there's been a real shift away from that, most government houses are being sold off now.*

Here because the general population is poor, people typically, not many people or public servants have their own house. So it is a real problem. But policy issues, in an attempt to address that, the government came up with what they call the Public Service Rental Scheme, you probably spoke to Shane about that yesterday and that policy I think was developed with all the right intentions. There weren't enough government-owned properties, government-owned houses to put public servants into. You had this whole mass of public servants who had essentially nowhere to live so they were trying to live with wantoks, relatives in houses with fifteen other people in two bedrooms and all this sort of thing.

So from a performance management perspective, really difficult to expect people to turn up on time with ironed clothes and do a good job if they've had no sleep for five days and this sort of thing. So in an attempt to sort of address or improve the housing situation this scheme was developed. This scheme involves the government entering into leases with private landlords and then public servants move into the house. So what happens is the public officers go out and they find a house. They come running back to their agency and they say, "I've found one and here it is and here's how much it is." The government housing unit will send someone out to do a check that it is worth the money that they're asking for and a few other bits and then it goes into the scheme.

Now, what has happened over the years is that the scheme is now rotted horrendously, so what you're finding is that the people with genuine needs are not the ones that are being able to access the rental scheme. It is people who own their own homes already who have moved out of those and rent those out then through the scheme, and then on the other hand go and find another house and collect, have their rent paid for that house by the scheme. So they're benefiting double; they're collecting rent here and they've having their rent paid here. Of course the people that really need the housing still have nothing.

So that scheme in my mind has been a gross failure. The gross failure comes in due to the lack of control and accountability around it. Most people know. Everyone knows here whether someone owns their own home or not and yet nobody is prepared to say no, that person should not go into the scheme, they've

got their own house. There are Permanent Secretaries, Under Secretaries, CEOs, other senior officers who are all doing this. So that scheme is not working and it is costing the government now something like 50 million dollars a year and only a very small percentage of public servants are accessing this scheme. So that's not working.

In agencies, discipline services like corrections and police they've undertaken their own programs to try and build more houses. So the corrections, for example, have been able to build houses at locations which are just east of Honiara, and in Honiara. They've done that with SIG money, Solomon Islands government money, through their development budgets and not through donor funding. They've done a lot of work trying to renovate houses in the provinces and bring them up to some sort of livable standard for their staff out there. Housing in the provinces is extreme in that there is none. The condition of most of the places that are out there are sub-standard, third world. So that is—and I don't know how the government is going to fix this problem because it is just going to cost so much money.

In corrections we begged donors for years to fund it because we felt that housing was absolutely vital to effective capacity building. How could you have the flexibility to transfer staff out to the provinces, provide services to the provinces, rotate staff through the provinces when there are no houses. So what it has sort of resulted in out in the provinces is that the people that work in those places live in those places and then there are all sorts of issues about wantok, particularly if you are a police officer or a corrections officer.

HAUSMAN: Have there been parallel efforts to raise pay or change pay ratios?

CLEARY: *There have been increases to public service salaries you know, percentage increases. I should point out that increments here were frozen for ten years up until fairly recently, maybe 2006, 2007 that was lifted, that freeze. But in comparison to trying to compete with private industry for a while and probably in comparison to what politicians receive, then I would say that public servants are not remunerated fairly. Other people would argue with me and say that they are, so that's pretty much a personal view.*

What is happening is that there is so much rotting of particular allowances, housing, there are other allowances called things like special duty allowance. So if you work in a discipline service or a nursing service, essential services they are, you can get—you're not allowed to claim over time but you get a special duty allowance as part of your normal fortnightly salary. Now what has happened over time is that every officer in those agencies whether I work 9 to 5 as the phone answering person or whether I'm working a 24-hour shift rotation in a prison, gets the allowance. So there is no incentive for example for being a shift worker. So I think there are issues in some of those types of areas.

HAUSMAN: Have there been efforts to change or improve the system even in individual agencies?

CLEARY: *The problem in a public service or a civil service is that you're locked into government policy and you're locked into government salary structure, and you're locked into government allowances. The attempts that have come have come through the schemes of service that I mentioned earlier, so they're like enterprise bargaining agreements that individual agencies or professions have entered into in an attempt to say in some cases we're special. There is a labor shortage in our area or whatever, so if you want to retain us you're going to have to pay us more.*

So that's an example of the thought process that could go into a scheme of service.

HAUSMAN: I've heard for example that in the Auditor General's office, the public servants there have gotten slightly better salaries than the average. Would that have happened through the schemes of service?

CLEARY: *No I don't think it would have. In fact, I'm not sure how that could happen. The Auditor General, they've had a lot of capacity building in there and a lot of advisor support and they're focused on graduate recruitment. So they've been selectively getting new graduates in. Now graduates do start on a higher salary level than non-qualified person for example. So that could be one reason why they could be on average getting something a bit more. But other than that I'm not sure why for example they'd be getting more. Salary is linked to qualifications. If you've got a tertiary qualification for example you'll come in on a higher level than you will without a tertiary qualification.*

HAUSMAN: Have there been any attempts to link pay with performance?

CLEARY: *No, there's no concept of that, none whatsoever. That's the short answer to that question.*

HAUSMAN: Let me ask a couple of questions about payroll. You mentioned that a new payroll system has recently been put in place. Could you describe the situation before the system and after it and how that is going?

CLEARY: *It's still very early days. I think they could still be in test running mode although I think the first real runs have actually happened now. The old system was archaic. It had no ability to—it got to the point at the end where it was about to fall over so you couldn't even run a fortnightly salary report. So there was no auditing of payroll going on anywhere. So corrections for example could have had police officers on their payroll. They could have had people being paid all sorts of allowances that they wouldn't have known about. There was no way of auditing or checking. So that was the first thing.*

It wasn't printing pay slips so staff were not getting pay slips. They just had to come and look at a computer screen in HR. So payday you'd have 50 million staff lining up in the HR area to find out about their pay. The process here, anytime there's an adjustment to salary like higher duties or an acting allowance or something, travel expenses or something, that's processed manually so they have to fill out salary adjustment form. That has to go to the head of the agency. Then it has to go to their ministry. There it has to go to the CEO in the ministry and then it has to finally go to payroll. So that could have taken months.

HAUSMAN: How does that work now?

CLEARY: *I'm not sure what has changed it. I haven't actually sort of tracked the system, have not been working as part of that system anymore. But I know the forms have had to change to meet the requirements of the new system but I'm not sure whether because of the manual process stuff whether that's still there, because that's what used to result in the delays. It is also where the opportunities for corruption come in. People would bypass their agencies and go straight to CEOs or people in payroll. You could sort of arrange any sort of payment you like practically.*

HAUSMAN: Let me ask you a couple of questions about sequencing and public support. You touched on some of this a little earlier. Have some reforms proved difficult to complete because other reforms haven't taken place yet? Or have some reforms undercut others?

CLEARY: *Yes, I think that's absolutely true. For example, if you're working in the Law and Justice Sector, they have a problem with recruiting and retaining lawyers. They've got a shortage of lawyers. The problem is that in the public sector we are not remunerating lawyers well enough to be able to hold them and retain them. They're going off and getting work in private industry or wherever.*

For some time now the Law and Justice Sector have been wanting to address that through a new scheme of service for lawyers that provides some incentives and hopefully, in the end, helps to retain lawyers. But, we've been saying to them, no, no, no please don't do that just yet because we're about to embark on a sort of public sector reform in relation to schemes of service. So that's one example where a ministry for example, wanting to move ahead with something but they're being a bit frustrated by us in that sense in that we're saying no, no, please hold off on that if you would.

One of the challenges for this program is actually managing the activities of HR advisors at all the other programs because we really don't want, for example, people running off writing new policies on recruitment selection because we want the central agency to be doing that and then the policy to be issued from here and then be implemented across sector. So that has been a challenge for us. We've sort of got that under control now because we're keeping track of all the HR advisors coming in. We get them together regularly and talk to them about what this program is doing, what our priorities are.

HAUSMAN: Is that coordination mostly with advisors from RAMSI or is it also—

CLEARY: *It is across the program, anyone working in a ministry of Solomon Islands government or public service workplace.*

HAUSMAN: Let me ask you a bit about public support. Who would you consider the constituents for these reforms and who has resisted them?

CLEARY: *We haven't seen any resistance yet. Wait, I shouldn't say that. I see the key stakeholders or the beneficiaries as one being the community because the level of service, the service delivery quality is appalling. If you go to any ministry or just about any ministry anyway, you could expect to just sit around and wait for hours. People might say to you he's gone out or they might not say that, and he has gone out, so you'll still wait for hours. Service delivery is appalling. So I guess this is all about trying to improve service delivery to the public.*

The second one are the staff or the public officers themselves. It is about trying to improve their conditions of employment, making things fair across the sector.

Resistance? There are people who have a vested interest in things not changing and they're the people who are benefiting now through corrupt processes and things like that. So yes, there are individuals, pockets of individual resistance I would say, and some of them quite high up, it could even be a Permanent Secretary level. However, I think that in general there is enough momentum now and enough commitment. You know the Solomon Islands government is saying we want to change. So it is difficult now for people in public service workplaces to

resist that. So I think that yes, there are small pockets but it is dwindling. The culture I think is beginning to change a little.

HAUSMAN: I know the PSIP is fairly new, but among the reforms that took place before the PSIP where there particular ones that got stuck because of this kind of resistance from vested interests?

CLEARY: *I think all of them. I think all of the previous attempts would have suffered that sort of resistance.*

HAUSMAN: Are there any particular examples which come to mind?

CLEARY: *I think the IDP program that I referred to which was basically a restructuring. Because there's been so much grow back. It just didn't work; what they did didn't work. The other thing I want to say is that nobody here, whether you're a senior officer, public servant, Permanent Secretary, nobody likes to make uncomfortable decisions that result in something bad happening to somebody else, whether that be a discipline matter or sorry, there's no longer a meaningful job for you to do. There is real, real resistance to that sort of decision-making. So influencing change from that perspective is hard because no one wants to do it.*

HAUSMAN: Are there some cultural issues here that you think either facilitate or get in the way of change?

CLEARY: *Yes there are. Gender, I mean culturally the attitude about women in the workplace is quite dominant. There are very, very few women in senior leadership roles in the public service. It is part of the problem I'd suggest, humbly suggest. Time. We view time differently than Solomon Islanders. Solomon Islanders have grown up in villages and in cultures where you do things when the sun comes up or when the tide is at the right level or when the bush is green or whatever. You don't necessarily do things when it is 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock or whatever. And there is a saying here that is called soul time. We use it a bit jokingly but it is not a joke really. There is no commitment to people keeping commitments at time. So if you say you're going to have a meeting at 10 o'clock people think it's funny when everyone turns up at 11 o'clock. So that's another thing.*

Then there is the whole family comes first thing. So it doesn't matter whether you're a lawyer and you've got a trial on, if there is an issue in the family the trial will come second. That lawyer will leave the workplace and go home and deal with the family issue because if they don't they could be—it's spoiled within the family.

HAUSMAN: I've heard that one strategy for dealing with, maintaining the independence of the public service is to have people work in areas where they didn't grow up. Is that something that is very widespread and do you think it has been successful?

CLEARY: *It is something, having done a bit of reading about what happened during the colonial era for example, it is something that they really tried to do during that era. Yes, I'd say there were aspects of that that worked because it is really, really difficult if you're a police officer to arrest your wantok. Just really, really difficult in this culture. We sort of see similar sorts of things in the aboriginal culture back in Australia.*

The housing issue now has really made that difficult. It has really impacted on that. I remember recently, when I say recently I mean within the last few years, I

remember one of the provincial premiers was actually from Makira, writing to the correctional service to say, you need to please move the staff around. You've got too many local staff here and we want to see some movement in the staffing, there's too much wantok business going on. So if you listen to what those people are saying then yes, that's an issue.

HAUSMAN: Let me ask a bit more about your cooperation with the Ministry of Public Service. How exactly do you work with them?

CLEARY: *It's interesting. This program is physically structured quite differently to the last program that I worked in where I was in amongst, sitting in the middle of the local staff and working on a one-on-one basis or a one-on-four basis with the HR team. I was surprised when I came into this program and found that the work fellows were sitting in an isolated location. One of the reasons that we put this round table that you and I are sitting at here was to encourage the local staff to come in and sit down with us and talk and have a cup of coffee. That has worked really well.*

As time has gone on we've gotten to know people better, we get up and walk around a lot. There's a but. But we asked. We had a workshop and we asked our counterparts what they thought and they weren't happy with this setup at all in actual fact. They don't like the fact that advisors are isolated from the local staff. They would much prefer to see us sitting out there with counterparts at the [Indecipherable]. So we're going to restructure ourselves a bit next year. For example I will go and sit with one of the Under Secretaries and work directly with that person.

I have to say that in my experience that is how I prefer to work here because so much of the capacity building happens just in discussions like we're having now.

HAUSMAN: Great, let me ask you maybe just one more question before finishing. I know you've only been working here for about seven months, but if there is anything you could go back and do again what would it be?

CLEARY: *In this program?*

HAUSMAN: Or I guess from your previous experience here in the Solomon Islands.

CLEARY: *Let me think. That's a really hard question to answer without thinking about it a bit. I'm a bit of a reflector. I think one of the things is that RAMSI has had, you've probably heard this term, a bottom-up approach. I think in some ways that has worked well but in others it has left big gaps. A common thread through all of these issues and problems that we've talked about this morning, leadership or the lack of, so if I were to think about the one thing we might do differently, it might be what could we have done a bit differently about equipping the senior public servants to actually manage and influence change.*

Because this is what we're really talking about. It's really one big change program and I don't think people know how to do it. I think maybe we've had to focus on our deliverables and outcomes, but we forget it is part of a change management process and that we need management in that context. Does that make sense?

HAUSMAN: Yes, actually let me ask you one more which is for other places what do you think are the biggest lessons that have emerged from the experience of public service

reform here in the Solomon Islands, again casting the net a bit wider than the PSIP.

CLEARY: *To be honest, I don't know a lot about other public sector reform programs. I've done a little bit of research into the approach that was taken in Samoa because that is held up as being a fairly successful reform program and Papua New Guinea simply because it is another Melanesian culture.*

The thing that I like about the approach that we're taking here and that could be a bit different to what others are doing, is that we're really, I feel, taking Solomon Islanders along for the ride. The ownership of these, of the work that we're doing belongs to the Solomon Islanders. So I don't promote for example the HR strategic plan as a plan that Lisa has developed. It is a plan that human resource managers in the Solomon Islands public service have developed and they're not my things in there, they're their things.

That nice little code of conduct booklet that we've got sitting here, this is the start of trying to get a performance management framework in place but I have worked with two staff in this ministry to develop this and we agreed, me and my counterparts, that the approach we were taking is that Lisa would do the writing, because I've got the English skills to write well, but the content would belong to them. So all the things that are in there about betelnut and not being allowed to chew it at work, looking professional and that sort of thing, come from the Solomon Islanders so it is their code of conduct.

I think a mistake that some programs could make is that the advisors or the work fellows come in and do the work. It's not owned so it doesn't happen, it's not sustainable in that sense.

HAUSMAN: All right. Thank you so much.