



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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## CREATING A 'CITIZEN FRIENDLY' DEPARTMENT: SPEEDING DOCUMENT PRODUCTION IN JORDAN, 1991 - 1996

### SYNOPSIS

When Nasouh Muhieddin Marzouqa took charge of the Civil Status and Passports Department in 1991, Jordanians widely scorned the agency for the poor quality of its services. Processing times were wildly unpredictable, and citizens could wait as long as two years to get some kinds of identity documents. Delays disrupted lives, impeding access to government benefits and hindering travel planning. Facing long lines and rude employees, many citizens gladly paid middlemen to shepherd their applications through the grueling process. Department staffers, tenured under rigid civil service laws, lacked motivation to speed processes that were manual and labor intensive. People used connections and bribes to deal with the department. For the next five years, Marzouqa, a retired police officer, tackled these problems, overhauling the department's highly centralized structure, eliminating unnecessary steps in document production and reorganizing offices. The department collected data on seasonal bulges in document demand and developed staff and training programs to deal with changing workloads. For the first time, Marzouqa incorporated the so-called national number, a unique number assigned to each citizen for social-security purposes, into document issuance and renewal procedures. By 1996, the time to get or renew any document had shortened consistently to a matter of hours. A trip to the department was no longer a test of endurance.

*Deepa Iyer compiled this policy note based on interviews conducted in Amman, Jordan in November 2010. A separate policy note, "[Building Operational Efficiency: Document Processing in Jordan](#)," focuses on the department from 1996 to 2005 under Marzouqa's successor, Awni Yarvas.*

### INTRODUCTION

In late 2010, Khalaf Theibat, an aged Bedouin wearing traditional Arab robes and a red-checked headdress, stood in a familiar location under a makeshift tarpaulin stall outside the main Amman branch of the Civil Status and Passports Department (CSPD). For nearly 25 years, he had made a good living by steering

frustrated Jordanians through the complex and time-consuming process of applying for passports and other required government documents. However, his business had slowed considerably since the old days. "The changes at this department are indescribable," Theibat said. "You can't find words to tell the story. I haven't had a citizen complain to me in ages now."

In the late 1980s, Jordanian citizens prepared themselves for an ordeal when setting out to obtain or renew an official document. The CSPD, responsible for issuing proof-of-identity documents, was notoriously disorganized and inefficient. Radio show hosts and newspaper cartoonists often parodied the trials faced by citizens who had to deal with the department.

A citizen who required department services encountered a series of roadblocks. "It was an obstacle course," recalled Shuhaiber Hamdan, a former director of administrative development at CSPD who worked there from 1968 to 2006. Lines of applicants wound around the main branch in Amman, and fistfights sometimes erupted between citizens jockeying for position. Employees often called the police to bring order and to settle quarrels. "The citizens, we were pieces in a very inconvenient game," recalled Bashir Khadra, a professor of administrative development at the University of Jordan.

Inside the main office, issuance and renewal processes were complex and labor intensive. Citizens and employees had to scramble between four floors to get applications completed. Guaranteed tenure by civil service laws, department staff "acted very arrogantly and impolitely," said Zuhair Al-Kayed, former director of Jordan's Civil Service Bureau. "They didn't care about the job, and routinely abused their power. It had a negative effect on service delivery."

Citizens had to interrupt their work schedules over days, weeks or months to return to the department and check the status of their applications. Enterprising middlemen like Theibat set up cramped stalls surrounding the main Amman branch, winning ready customers with vague offers of connections to expedite applications. "Everyone preferred to work through them, paying a fee, instead of working with department employees," said Khadra. "You went through all this, and, if you were lucky, would be called to gather at 2 p.m. one afternoon many days later for delivery in an open area.

Everyone, all at once. An employee would call the name of the document owner, and when the owner raised his hand and voice, the official would throw the document at the owner. Sometimes, the owner would catch it. Otherwise, it fell on the ground."

The CSPD's shortcomings were especially glaring because the department was central to the lives of Jordanians. It registered families and their demographics into the civil register, issuing personal identification cards, citizenship certificates, family books identifying each family unit's members, and certificates of birth, death, marriage and divorce. The department issued, renewed and extended Jordanian passports, pilgrimage permits and temporary passports for West Bank and Gaza residents. It also was responsible for compiling demographic statistics for use by other arms of the government.

"This was the department with the largest amount of interaction with citizens. We have an impact on every detail in citizens' lives since birth. This is why it was such a trial," said Salman Qudah, a department employee since 1985. Civil status documents like national IDs, family books, birth certificates and death certificates allowed citizens to access most state services and benefits. Jordanian citizens depended even more on their passports. Given Jordan's history as a regional melting pot, citizens of Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian and Iraqi expatriate origin frequently visited families in other parts of the Middle East. Students studying abroad and pilgrims going on the Hajj, made yearly by pious Muslims, also contributed to seasonal swings in passport demand. "People often had to postpone plans ... by a student to study in Alexandria, by someone to go on the Hajj, by a Palestinian citizen to visit family in the West Bank, just because they could not get their passport on time. It was very hard on the citizen," said veteran employee Hamdan.

Public discontent grew, as citizens increasingly called into radio shows, run by local activists, to complain about their troubles with the

department. The media labeled a trip to the department as “The Path of Sorrows,” an allusion to Jesus’ journey before his crucifixion. The CSPD reached a breaking point when the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait triggered the Gulf War, releasing a torrent of 350,000 Jordanian returnees,<sup>1</sup> largely of Palestinian origin. The sudden spike in document demand inundated the already struggling CSPD. The Council of Ministers, Jordan’s cabinet, decided that the department needed a firm hand to tackle inefficiencies. In June 1991, Minister of the Interior Jawdat Al Sbool called Nasouh Muhieddin Marzouqa, a retired Public Security Department official, in for coffee to offer him the position. Traditionally, the cabinet offered director-general roles in ministries’ sub-departments to high-level public security officials with long track records of government service. Marzouqa had extensive policing experience, from directing the kingdom’s criminal-investigations unit to heading the Royal Police Academy.

Initially, Al Sbool offered Marzouqa a choice of two jobs: the socially prestigious governorship of Amman, or director general of CSPD. While Al Sbool attempted to persuade him to accept the governorship, which involved frequent interaction with the king, Marzouqa’s background in investigative and detective work led him to favor the CSPD position. As a public security officer who once worked in the West Bank, Marzouqa had witnessed border problems emerging from data-entry errors on citizens’ passports. Unsuspecting and innocent citizens occasionally found themselves behind bars when their names matched those of criminals. Marzouqa enjoyed unraveling such puzzles. He had solved several high-profile murder cases while working with the Public Security Department. For him, the CSPD post offered him a chance to further such investigative work, using different types of data to inform managerial techniques. Marzouqa’s other motivation was his religion. “Serving citizens is my way of being a good Muslim,” he said. “I had

heard citizens complaining about the department very often.”

In July 1991, the council appointed Marzouqa as director general, and he set about leading a department-wide turnaround. Constrained by stiff resistance from employees, rigid civil service regulations that limited hiring and firing, and a low budget, Marzouqa and his team devised several solutions to the department’s problems. Internally driven, widespread reforms overhauled the department’s organizational structure, removed steps that delayed processes, enhanced training, upgraded technology and increased employees’ productivity. “We couldn’t afford a consulting company, so we did it ourselves,” Marzouqa said. By the end of his tenure in 1996, the average time it took to get or renew a passport or a civil status document had shrunk to just two hours.<sup>2</sup>

## THE CHALLENGE

After the founding of the Transjordan Emirate in 1921, the Jordanian army, initially under British supervision, managed the issuance and renewal of passports. Civil status documents—birth and death certificates, family books and personal ID cards—were handled by several different ministries until the Council of Ministers created the Department of Civil Status in 1968. In January 1988, the council decided to merge the two operations into a new Civil Status and Passports Department within the Ministry of Interior, led by a single director general. “Both civil status and passports are documents used to identify citizens,” said former CSPD official Hamdan. “Both functions worked according to the stipulations of the Jordanian Law of Nationality—they required the same application inputs. Merging them made sense to the Council of Ministers at the time for accuracy of data across functions.”

Following the merger, the new department’s performance stagnated. “There was no clear vision for the department,” recalled Hamdan. Issa

Omari, another former Public Security Department cadre who directed the department immediately after the merger from 1988 to 1991, said, “We were unsure how, exactly, the two entities should be merged. The two halves were competing with each other. There was uncertainty about how the new department should function. It was a mess.”

Inconsistent and inconvenient service delivery emerged from organizational deficiencies in four areas: processes, employee and workload distribution, employee performance and motivation, and technology use.

#### *Problematic processes*

Processes were labor-intensive, and implementation was erratic. For example, passport issuance and renewal, the most complicated processes, took 12 manual steps performed by 10 different employees. In the main branch in Amman, which processed the most applications daily, an average of 300-400 application files moved daily between four floors, traveling hand-to-hand between the archives in the basement, the accountants on the ground and third floors, the office manager and receptionists on the second floor, the printers on the first floor, and the director general on the fourth.

Delays were common at every step of every process. Complex application forms requiring unnecessary details confused both citizens and employees. The archives were disorganized, with bulky files “lying open, scattered all over, and even rats running around,” recalled Omari.

Additionally, every passport issued required the signature of the director general. Regardless of the time of completion, employees distributed all completed passports at 1 p.m. because the director general (or branch director) traditionally signed applications at 12:30. Crowds would assemble by the department at this time, and employees would toss passports at them. Accountants could not keep more than 50 Jordanian dinars (approximately US\$70) in their cash registers,

according to government regulations. They routinely left at 1 p.m. to deposit money at the bank, leaving citizens who needed to pay fees after that time in limbo. “Each step in the process could sometimes take more than an entire day,” said Hamdan. A backlog developed as employees left applications incomplete at every stage of the process.

#### *Workload worries*

The merged department retained separate civil status and passport wings, and each had a manager whose job was to coordinate matters of policy. Rigidities in the system hampered the department’s ability to deal with seasonal swings in demand for various documents. During summer, demand for new and renewal passports increased as families vacationed, expatriates returned and Palestinians visited the West Bank. Work volume also expanded sharply during the Hajj and Umra pilgrimage seasons, and at the end of the school year, when the college application process required students to get official documents certified by the CSPD.

Most employees could perform only the document processes they had training in. Employees trained to produce birth or death certificates could not produce passports, and vice versa. Hiring new employees to cope with short-term demand fluctuations was not an option because the Civil Service Bureau maintained strict annual quotas on hiring. The department needed a solution to address seasonal shifts in the volume of applications.

A second work-distribution problem involved staffing of department branches. In several regions, citizens traveled nearly 200 kilometers to access a branch, or simply went to the main branch in Amman. Because the department had no way of tracking branches’ application traffic, no system existed to allocate the workforce according to the workload. Allocation did not consider employee competencies, population density in a branch’s area or a branch’s volume of applications. “Branches in

rural regions received merely two to three applications daily, while in urban branches like Amman, Irbid, or Aqaba, hundreds of applications came in,” Marzouqa said. “You had employees doing nothing in rural branches and employee shortages in the busy ones.”

#### *Unmotivated employees*

Department employees lacked professionalism. Marzouqa recalled employees “lounging around, gossiping, reading newspapers, drinking tea and coffee by the gallon.” Mothers would often bring their children to work. “Babies crawled around and got under peoples’ feet; the women running the printers would just stand around and gossip; people would leave to eat or pray at all times of the day,” he said. Employees frequently went home by 2 p.m.

In dealings with citizens, staff were “impatient, impolite, arrogant and generally unhelpful,” said Al-Kayed, the former director of the Civil Service Bureau. In Jordan, government employees traditionally operated in a culture of privilege, and the CSPD was no exception. Employees purposefully delayed processing for applicants whose behavior irked them, leaving unfinished applications on desks for days. Additionally, because Jordanian surnames indicated nearly everything about an applicant’s social, ethnic and tribal status, department employees could easily discriminate against certain groups by delaying applications, and they did so often. Extortion was commonplace, and employees often used their jobs to conduct side businesses, such as selling used postage stamps from old applications. “Attitudes and behaviors needed to change because they were having a bad impact on services—an uphill task, really,” said Al-Kayed. Long-time CSPD employee Qudah added, “Citizens used connections and bribes because there was no other way of getting the job done.”

#### *Technological hurdles*

Although computers had existed in the department since 1983, many were unused, and few employees had computer-related skills. Many of the machines lacked the processing power and memory to handle the large quantities of data handled by the CSPD.

Computer equipment was distributed unevenly among branch offices, and as a result most branches had no connection with the department’s main server in Amman. Branches mailed applications to Amman for archiving, adding to the disarray and disorganization in the central office. “Mailed materials from branches were often misplaced, left lying around, or lost in the mail,” Hamdan said. “We could only call them on the phone to communicate. It took hours to check sometimes.”

Employees continued to write data into ledgers despite the availability of computers. Without proper verification, this manual process contributed to high numbers of errors. “We frequently found sons miraculously older than their mothers,” said Omari. Similarities between names contributed to these mistakes. For instance, the name Mohammad could be spelled in several different ways in Arabic script. Spelling was left to the discretion of the employee. Other names could apply to males or females, and many employees arbitrarily assigned a gender when trying to verify records. Department employees inadvertently issued duplicate documents when previous records under a specific spelling did not surface in the archives, or when citizens recorded different spellings in applications. Inconsistent surnames meant invalid documentation and normally required an extra trip to a courtroom to legally standardize surname spelling.

Hamdan, whom fellow employees called the department’s “encyclopedia” because of the extensive knowledge he had gained from nearly four decades at the CSPD, summarized the

problems: “Every single thing took so long that nothing was happening.”

### FRAMING A RESPONSE

When he became director general in July 1991, Marzouqa set about tackling these challenges. The heavy migration flows induced by the Gulf crisis and the ensuing spate of applications for new and renewal passports required quick action to avoid further bottlenecks. By the end of the year, Marzouqa set several measures in place to manage a concerted turnaround strategy.

As a newcomer to the department, Marzouqa recognized that he first needed information to identify and prioritize key issues. In his early months on the job, he consulted with department veterans like Hamdan as well as with lower-level managers in an effort to learn the intricacies and nuances of the document-issuance processes. Concurrently, he met with people who had expertise in administrative development—such as Khadra at the University of Jordan and Al-Kayed, who was director of the Committee on Administrative Development at the time—to speak about the delays and how they could be addressed. “Within one week, you could say, he had grasped the problems at the department. After that, he was talking to as many people as possible to try to pair problems with solutions,” said Qudah.

Marzouqa required all managers to produce daily, weekly and monthly reports containing data on application volumes, daily tasks, problematic employees and process delays. For two months, Marzouqa, Hamdan and other managers sat for hours daily at the department’s service counters, keeping detailed notes on processes and employees’ interactions with citizens. In these reports, officials identified key problem areas. “It was a very consultative process,” Marzouqa said. “We tried to ask as many people as possible for problems and ideas, from professors and experts to

our own employees to the citizens themselves.”

Marzouqa also initiated an open-door policy that allowed citizens to walk in without appointments to air complaints about processes or employee behavior. He kept track of complaints and looked for trends. He formed a Committee on Citizen Complaints, comprising three senior employees, to meet with citizens and compile reports on application-related mishaps on a case-by-case basis. Previously, citizens who wanted to address mistakes in applications had to file lawsuits, a process that could take years. Now, citizens’ complaints could be resolved swiftly.

To formalize the employee-observation process, Marzouqa formed the Development, Training and Modernization Committee, which later became the Department of Administrative Development and Training, and appointed Hamdan, the CSPD veteran, to lead it. The committee measured employees’ training levels and identified steps that delayed processes.

Conducting a survey and tracking the records of employees, they found that fewer than 3% had attended training courses and that veteran employees rarely trained new ones on the job.

Marzouqa and Hamdan drafted a list of “citizen friendly” objectives, based on their observations at the service counters, and presented the list to department sub-managers. The list included completing applications as quickly as possible without compromising quality, changing CSPD’s image from that of a “favor provider” into one of a “service provider,” changing employees’ attitudes toward the public, and training employees to improve skills, facilitate intra-department transfers and promote computer usage.

The managerial team widely publicized these objectives among department staff, holding meetings and posting the objectives on notice boards. They also hung posters containing all the information needed for each process. To facilitate implementation, Marzouqa created rules of thumb for employees to follow. While observing

processes at the counter, he and Hamdan had used stopwatches to determine how long certain procedures took, and they used the findings to calculate average time requirements. Using these motion studies, Marzouqa set two service-delivery goals: First, citizens should receive newly issued documents on the same day they submit their applications; second, citizens should receive document renewals within two hours.

Marzouqa knew that achieving these objectives would require an overhaul of the CSPD’s organizational structure (see Figures 1 and 2). The division of the civil-status operation from the passports wing, with separate staffs, managers and budgets for each, did not make sense. “Employees could not perform the job of the department as a whole. I wanted the whole department to have a single vision: being as citizen-friendly as possible. This required integrating the department better,” he said. Marzouqa set about the overhaul by forming committees to examine particular areas. These committees translated eventually into departments, while separate manager positions—one for civil status and one for passports—were eliminated.

The Development, Training and Modernization Committee eventually became the Department of Administrative Development and Training, headed by Hamdan from 1992 to 2002. The Committee on Laws and Legislations, formed by Marzouqa to compile a book of all the laws covering the department’s activities, became the Legal Affairs Unit. The Employee Affairs Committee, formed by Marzouqa to examine citizens’ complaints against specific employees, became the Central Inspection Office, responsible for human resources and monitoring employees.

Meanwhile, Marzouqa and his team made several temporary fixes to secure short-term gains and work toward long-term solutions. Marzouqa set a top priority on addressing backlogs and dealing with all security-sensitive applications related to Gulf Crisis returnees, extending the workday to 7 p.m. He stayed at the department until the last employee left, to make it clear that work rules applied to everyone, including the boss.

In a further move to clear the backlog, Marzouqa simplified processes for Gulf-related applications. Because of security concerns linked to Palestinian militant organizations, the CSPD

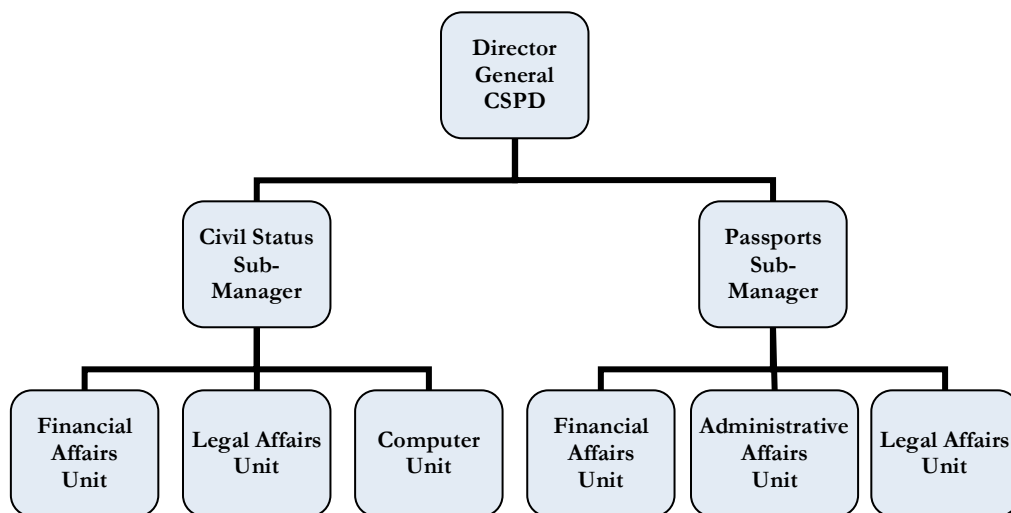


Figure 1. Department Structure from 1988 to 1991

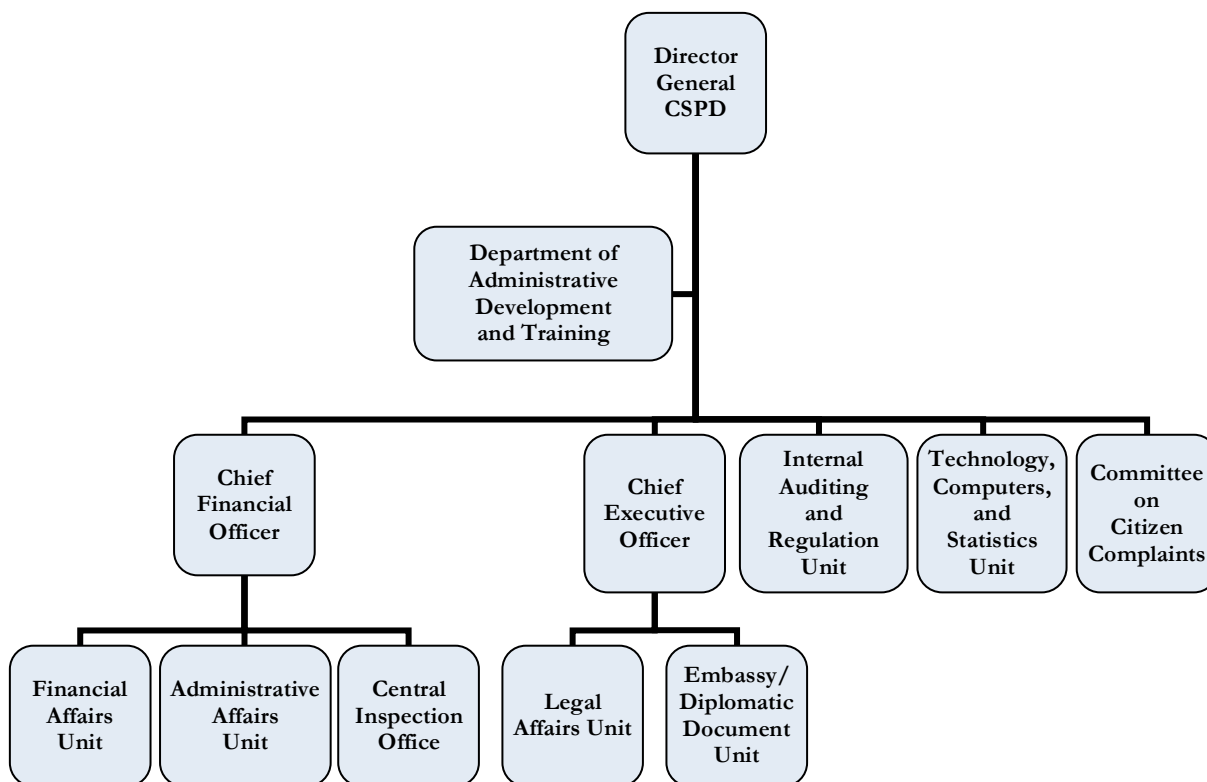


Figure 2. Department Structure from 1991 to 1996

had to get clearance from the Public Security Department for all returnees’ documentation, a requirement that could take weeks. Leveraging contacts he had made during his work at the Public Security Department, Marzouqa received permission for the CSPD to issue temporary clearances. These actions cleared a bottleneck, and the backlog disappeared within weeks.

Hamdan said the initial changes in Marzouqa’s first year “really set the stage for what was to come later. When I first entered the department in 1968, one of the managers told me that ‘Before any story of the land can be told, it is the priority of the state to know the numbers of its people and their demographics.’ Finally, this was starting to happen here in Jordan.”

### GETTING DOWN TO WORK

While setting up a long-term infrastructure to manage changes, Marzouqa began revising

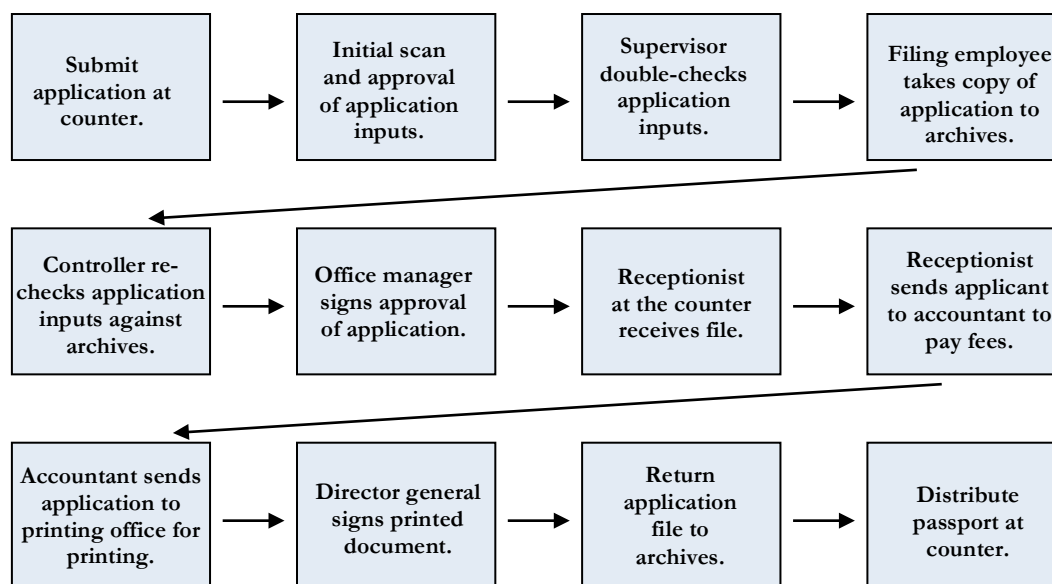
processes, implementing use of the national number into procedures, emphasizing employee training, increasing branch breadth and monitoring employee performance.

#### *Streamlining processes*

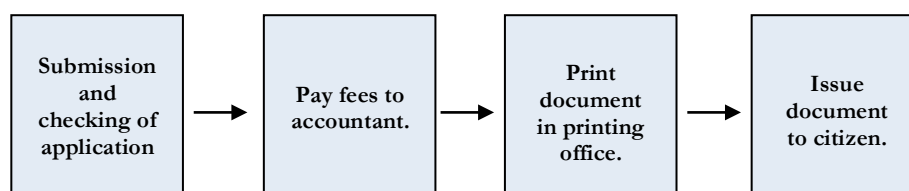
Marzouqa and his team condensed procedures for all documents, from passports to national IDs, birth certificates and death certificates. They first focused on the passport issuance and renewal process, which was the most complicated. It involved 12 steps performed by 10 employees, in addition to 10 office runners who carried materials from employee to employee (Figure 3).

After observing and timing processes, Marzouqa and his team cut this 12-step, 10-person process down to four steps by four employees at the same counter (Figure 4). First, an employee checked application inputs, entered data into a computer and approved the application.





**Figure 3. Pre-Reform Process Chart for Passport Issuance and Renewal**



**Figure 4. Post-Reform Process Chart for Passport Issuance and Renewal**

Second, the applicant went to the accountant (next in line at the counter), who accepted and processed payments. During this time, another employee printed the new or renewed passport in the printing office. Within two hours, a manager (also at the counter) signed the application, after which the citizen received the completed passport.

Before the reforms, office assistants had to double-check application inputs manually with documents in the archives. Employees worked to organize the previously chaotic archives alphabetically, with files arranged by family. Data-entry employees entered the archives' information into the computer system. Eventually, computer algorithms double-checked application inputs as the archives were entered electronically. This process, started under Marzouqa, reached completion under his successor.

Marzouqa personally supervised a construction team in late 1991 that reconfigured workspace to accommodate the new processes and increase accessibility for citizens. He had workers remove the walls between offices on the ground floor and add counter space. He then moved all employees directly involved in the process (data-entry specialists, accountants, printing workers and managers) behind the same counter. Support staff such as typists worked in the same hall, visible to the citizens. "I feel that this worked because employees were directly witnessed by the citizen; they could no longer shirk their duties," Marzouqa said.

#### *Implementing the national number*

To address the problem of data-entry errors from spelling inconsistencies, Marzouqa decided

to use citizens' national numbers as a key element in issuance and renewal processes. The government had used national numbers since 1983 for social-security purposes. Each 10-digit number indicated a citizen's year of birth, gender and number in the registration queue. Before the merger, the Department of Civil Status had asked citizens to submit their numbers with all applications, but the numbers were never actively used for processing.

Before national numbers could be incorporated into processes, however, technical equipment and support services had to be improved. Marzouqa forged a partnership with the Royal Scientific Society, Jordan's largest technical-research organization. The society assessed the department's information-technology equipment and found the system didn't have the power to hold data on the entire Jordanian population. Additionally, key support equipment was missing, including photocopying machines and generators for use during power outages.

Marzouqa approached the leaders of the Royal Jordanian Air Force, who were friends from his past work at the Public Security Department, on the recommendation of the scientific society. They formed a joint technical committee and looked deeper into the department's computer problems. The air force sent eight staff members to train department employees on data entry, verification and IT usage for two years. In 1995, IT staff connected 20 branches to the main servers in Amman, so that branch employees could easily look up information. The department installed a generator system to deal with power outages. On the whole, however, equipment was hard to come by. "Because of low budgets, we could not afford to buy new devices," Marzouqa said. "We could only update what we had and learn to use it better."

The Committee on Development, Training and Administration assigned employees to compare name entries in manual files with those in computer databases. If a duplication existed (for

example, two people with precisely the same name) and if all other data matched (date and place of birth, mother's maiden name, etc.), they would cancel one of the files. They then linked national number data, using a computer search program, to the citizens' electronic files.

All newly issued documents received stamps with citizens' national numbers. Documents that came in for renewal after expiration also received stamps, which allowed all documents in circulation to eventually carry the numbers. The department focused first on civil-status documents like birth and death certificates, and in 1996 began issuing national IDs and passports with national numbers. With unique numbers on official documents, cases of mistaken identity at border crossings, an especially irksome problem, were nearly eliminated.

#### *Productivity training*

Training programs instituted during Marzouqa's tenure served two purposes: to facilitate employee transfers and to improve employee skill levels. To facilitate transfers and meet seasonal demand fluctuations, the CSPD trained employees to perform issuance and renewal procedures for all types of documents. "We created a comprehensive employee: one who could be shifted from task to task based on what the citizens needed," said Hamdan. "The same person could become an employee of any unit in the department. They could work at the counter, issuing a passport, or they could receive citizen complaints." Marzouqa used the weekly and monthly reports submitted by sub-managers to assess application volumes and accordingly allocate employees and equipment to specific processes in branches.

To improve employee skills, Marzouqa sent assistant managers and managers to training and certification courses at the Jordan Institute of Public Administration and the Royal Scientific Society. Staff members from the society taught computer courses at the department. The training

team circulated among employees a book on laws covering the department, produced by the Legal Affairs Unit.

### *Decentralization*

Broadening citizens' access to its services in rural areas, the CSPD expanded its branch network by nearly two-thirds during Marzouqa's tenure, lifting the total number to 74 in 1996 from 45 in 1991. Marzouqa's team worked directly with municipalities to open branches, taking variables like population density, demographics and potential application volume into account. Enthusiastic municipalities often would offer buildings as office space to the department, alleviating the constraints of a low budget. To staff the branches, Marzouqa negotiated with the Civil Service Bureau for an increase in the department's headcount. Employee numbers rose to 978 in 1996 from 870 in 1991, an increase of 12%.

### *Evaluating employee performance*

In 1992, Marzouqa internalized the monitoring of employee performance by forming the Central Inspection Office. Initially, the office consisted of four staff members who assessed every aspect of the department's daily work. Each staff member was responsible for analyzing a particular issue—either finances, computers, administration or processes. They dropped in, unannounced, to perform informal audits in each of these fields, submitting weekly reports on employee productivity (for example, for a document employee, the number of applications completed daily, or the person's manner of interacting with citizens). If a shortcoming was identified, sub-managers summoned the employee to discuss the reports and urge improved performance.

Managers and the director general met twice a year to discuss the findings of the inspection office. In addition to these reports, employees' direct supervisors evaluated them, as well as the directors of their branches. Evaluations were based

on 30 criteria in six categories: abiding by working hours, interactions with citizens, interactions with colleagues, accuracy, the extent to which the employee completed daily tasks, and the employee's qualifications.

Budgetary limitations constrained Marzouqa's efforts to motivate employees and improve performance. Because raising salaries was not an immediate option, Marzouqa loosened up the rigid bonus system. At the end of each working year, every employee in the department received a bonus based on an equal portion of a pool allocated by the Ministry of Finance. Typically, each employee received a bonus of about 10 Jordanian dinars per year (approximately US\$20). Marzouqa changed the bonus structure, linking the same pool of bonuses to performance, based on inspection-office reports. Employees who performed well received a larger percentage of the pool, while poor performers received less.

Marzouqa also informally changed promotion procedures within the department. "I put the qualified person in the qualified place," he said. Upon entering the department and observing its workings, he promoted several experienced staff members, including Hamdan and Qudah, to senior positions. He continued this policy throughout his tenure. Previously, promotions had hinged on seniority. "He made it clear that staying around a long time was not the incentive for career development in his department. Rather, performing well was," Hamdan said.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

"At every single step of the process, there was someone pushing back. Resistance, resistance, resistance," Marzouqa said in describing the key hurdle he faced. Al Kayed echoed the sentiment: "They faced so much opposition, so much inertia from employees to change the status quo."

To improve employee behavior and build a more client-friendly attitude among workers, Marzouqa used management techniques drawn from his work in the police service. "He never left

the office until the last person left,” recalled Salman Qudah. “It seemed like he was always there.” Hamdan agreed, saying, “He couldn’t increase salaries, but still, the employees for the first time felt respected. He knew each of them and would drive someone home if they needed a ride.”

Marzouqa faced opposition not only from lower-level employees but also from his sub-managers. When he was observing processes at the counter, for example, they “would complain of aches and pains, and tried to make excuses to go back to their offices, even though I was a much older gentleman than any of them,” Marzouqa recalled. “They felt like they were losing their prestige in front of the citizens.”

The success of many of Marzouqa’s reforms depended on his ability to get his employees to recognize that they were not above the citizens they served.<sup>3</sup> Doing this required staffers to understand that government employees were not superior to regular citizens, and that citizens had the right to challenge civil servants who were not doing their jobs well. Marzouqa led by example. His open-door policy for citizens sent a strong message to department employees, and he frequently visited branches to keep an eye on things. These recurrent surprise visits to observe processes in branches—occasionally with Marzouqa in disguise—made it clear that top management held employees accountable for their actions. “Every single employee had to expect that the head of department could visit them at any second,” said Qudah. “It deterred them from wasting time.”

Marzouqa personally rebuked errant employees. When he visited a branch in disguise and found employees misbehaving, he would call the employees in question to his office and say, “You treated a certain veiled old man very badly when he came to get services from your branch. Is this really the image you want to give of yourself and our department?” In one instance, Marzouqa received several complaints against a branch

manager who kept citizens waiting outside his office for days. After speaking with him once about it, Marzouqa expected the problem to cease. When it did not, he called the employee to an urgent meeting at the main office in Amman. When the employee arrived, Marzouqa purposefully left him in his waiting room for hours. The employee became agitated, pacing around the room and irritating the secretaries. When he finally called the branch manager in, Marzouqa calmly said, “At least you had coffee and tea, as well as a seat to sit, in my waiting room. Many of the citizens who you subject to this treatment don’t even have that.” The employee changed his ways, Marzouqa said.

In other cases, Marzouqa would take pains to carefully explain the department’s objectives. For example, in his second week on the job, he called a meeting of all the senior sub-managers and floated the idea for the list of objectives, saying that eventually a passport should be renewed within one hour. The sub-managers objected, and one senior official made the case that, if this were done, citizens would not value their passports, and instances of loss or damage would rise drastically. Marzouqa persuaded the managers that this would not happen because the procedures for getting a new passport after an instance of loss or damage involved higher fees and a longer waiting period.

Some cases required sterner measures, even though employees, under strict civil service labor laws, could not be fired unless they committed a felony. At the beginning of his tenure, Marzouqa had six sub-managers who, despite his overtures, would not cooperate with his reform vision. After a few months, he approached the Council of Ministers and requested their dismissal, as this was the only way that he could proceed, given civil service regulations. When the council twice postponed addressing his request, he issued an ultimatum, saying, “Either they go or I go. If you want things to happen, we cannot have such poor leadership in managerial positions.” Given Marzouqa’s long tenure at the Public Security

Department and his respected judgment, the Council of Ministers acquiesced.

Another constraint on Marzouqa's reform momentum was a lack of political will. Although he had tacit support from King Hussein, who facilitated his appointment in 1991, frequent cabinet turnover (typically every year in Jordan) meant that expressions of political support from ministers were fleeting. "The government would only give us financial resources after we demonstrated results," said Marzouqa.

A critical turning point was the 1994 election. Marzouqa suggested using the national number to identify people in election lists. The department spearheaded the election registration effort, helping to reduce problems of ghost voters and people who voted multiple times. "Marzouqa used this to convince the government of the importance of reforming CSPD. The state started supporting and believing in our reforms," said Hamdan. During Marzouqa's tenure, the department's budget rose 31% to 3,660,000 dinars. "Towards the end, we could pressure the government to give us the needed finances because we were doing a good job," Marzouqa asserted.

## ASSESSING RESULTS

Before reforms, the department had no system for collecting data on processing times. Several employees, however, agreed that document processing times varied widely, ranging from as long as two years to as short as four or five hours. In 1996, at the end of Marzouqa's tenure, department data systematically measured processing times and indicated that the average time to process a passport or a civil status document was just two hours. Because fees were set by law and the Ministry of Finance allocated the department budget, citizens did not face an increase in fees paid despite improved services.

Streamlining processes, the main determinant of reduced processing time, did not compromise quality. The department implemented several measures designed to prevent forgery and fraud,

from fingerprinting and specialized barcodes to holographic stamps that yielded special images when held under a flame. As a result, Jordanian passports became compliant with International Civil Aviation Organization standards. According to department data, the number of cases related to illegal fabrication fell annually, starting in 1991 with Marzouqa's tenure. After 1999, no cases of fabrication were reported.

Employee motivation was important in the absence of the ability to hire and fire. During Marzouqa's tenure, employee performance improved as employees were held more accountable through informal audits, enhanced training and restructured offices that made them more visible to citizens. Interviewees mentioned that corruption lessened because applications changed hands fewer times as procedures became increasingly streamlined and employees became more accountable. Bribes to speed up applications became superfluous as delivery times shrank. According to some of the middlemen occupying stalls outside the Amman branch, demand for their services fell. The department even opened a free help desk that provided an alternative.

According to Sawsan Gharaibeh, a governance analyst for the United Nations Development Programme in Jordan, issuance and renewal processes became more equitable. It was no longer possible for employees to delay applications based on applicants' last names, especially after national numbers came into use. "I think that this was an inadvertent outcome of the reforms. As the processes became more standardized and transparent, and employees were held more accountable, the general public began to realize that there is little room for discrimination or favoritism, and this all led to increasing the trust in the department," she said.

Previously, service delivery lacked consistency and convenience. Hamdan attributed public dissatisfaction to these factors. "Our peoples' culture is somewhat impatient. We used to joke at the department that citizens had helicopters

waiting for them on top of the building!” he said. The middlemen standing outside the Amman branch echoed this sentiment and told stories about citizens’ impatience. Despite this perceived impatience, between 1992 and 1996 complaints against the department fell. According to Marzouqa and other employees, the Committee on Citizen Complaints, which received an influx of complaints between 1991 and 1993, received none by 1995-1996.

According to many interviewees, fewer and fewer citizens called into citizen activists’ radio shows to criticize the department. Instead, they were likely to praise the department on these shows and send in letters of appreciation.<sup>4</sup> In one such letter, an effusive citizen wrote to Marzouqa, “Upon your appointment, I was curious to see whether you would influence the department with your police background of discipline and efficiency, or whether the department would conversely inject you with laziness and disorganization. I am so glad to see that the former happened!”

## REFLECTIONS

Several interviewees described Nasouh Marzouqa’s tenure as a period that jolted the department out of lethargy, setting the stage for further reforms under his successor, Awni Yarvas. The stability of leadership at the department, Marzouqa from 1991 to 1996 and Yarvas from 1996 to 2005, was a crucial determinant of the

turnaround’s success. In Jordan, with its history of frequent cabinet turnover, reform momentum was rarely sustained because “successors rarely saw eye to eye with predecessors. Frequent ministerial changes in the cabinet meant that director generals of departments within ministries faced yearly changes in the ministries’ policy and management, so how could anything happen? CSPD was the sole exception to this Achilles’ heel,” said Zuhair Al-Kayed, former director of Jordan’s Civil Service Bureau.

Marzouqa’s management style—which involved identifying problems through extensive consultation and observation—“was really what got the job done,” said Bashir Khadra, professor of administrative development at the University of Jordan. Longtime department employee Salman Qudah added, “He really put himself into the shoes of the employee, and the shoes of the citizen, to solve problems and devise solutions. In this sense, it was not just reform. It was revolution.”

Issa Omari, Marzouqa’s predecessor, said, “Any manager in the world must admit that he makes mistakes and that he cannot possibly get everything done. That’s why reforms in CSPD eventually succeeded.” Khadra echoed these sentiments, using an Arab saying: “Many people fail because they carry and attempt to throw a big stone. If you want the stone to reach its destination when thrown, carry several small stones. That is what Marzouqa did.”

<sup>1</sup> Al Abed, Oroub. “Palestinian Refugees in Jordan.” *Forced Migration Research Guide*. February 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Civil Status and Passports Department, Department of Administrative Development. *Civil Status and Passports Datasheet, 1989-2009*.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, famous Jordanian cartoonist Imad Hajjaj’s comic strip parodying this bureaucratic culture at <http://www.mahjoob.com/en/archives/view.php?cartoonid=1624>.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, several citizens’ blogs praising the department at <http://www.7iber.com/2010/09/positive-government-transaction/> and <http://www.black-iris.com/2010/10/03/renewing-a-canadian-passport-in-amman-is-tougher-than-renewing-a-jordanian-one/>.

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