



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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SCHER: My name is Daniel Scher; I'm the associate director of the Innovations for Successful Societies project, and I'm here with Ms. Taboka Nkhwa. Thank you very much, ma'am, for taking time out of your day to meet with me. Before we dive right into some questions about your time at DPSM [Directorate of Public Service Management], I wonder if you would mind just briefly introducing yourself and telling us a little bit about your career.

NKHWA: *My name is Taboka Nkhwa, deputy permanent secretary in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. I come from a human resource management background and a long history in public service transformation. I have for a long time been a management consultant responsible for looking at organizational structures, ministerial structures, functions, and processes, and working with ministries to improve the business of the various portfolio mandates—by redefining the mandates, by setting up structures and helping to reorganize and improve those structures for improved performance and accountability for delivery. I've also been part of the transformation journey of the Botswana public service, which included, among other things, the setting up of the Performance Management System for the public service of Botswana; the training of senior public officers and middle managers in the area of performance management; working with public service organizations to redefine the purpose of their respective organizations, setting organizational goals, putting in place performance measures and performance reviews for accountability and delivery.*

It's been an exciting journey, being with the transformation movement since 1999 to date. Of course in the middle I've had gaps. I have had the opportunity to work at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. I was appointed deputy director under the Governance and Institutional Development Division [GIDD] as deputy director responsible for human resource management issues in the Commonwealth public services. This was an equally exciting opportunity which gave me a platform to broaden my scope in looking at the public sector performance improvement strategies and challenges from a bigger Commonwealth platform, where we worked with public services across the whole of the Commonwealth: the Caribbean, Africa, the Pacific, and many other countries. It's been a very interesting experience having to work with management gurus from Canada, from Australia, from New Zealand, from Singapore and many other countries.

SCHER: Excellent, thank you, ma'am. I have a couple of specific questions about systems and processes within the DPSM, but before I get to that I have a general question that I'm very interested to hear from somebody who has really pushed change forward from a high-level position and who has experience of the challenges of public sector transformation in other countries. In many of the places we work, it seems that during these types of reforms and these types of changes, it's very difficult to get people to change the way they do things. And yet in Botswana it seems like you've been very successful in creating an ethos where people actually want to learn how to do things differently and how to become more effective. I wonder if, as a person who has led these changes, you could reflect a little bit on how you managed to build a constituency for support?

NKHWA: *Thank you very much. Any change, especially transformation, where it requires large-scale change and deals with large-scale organization such as changing the public service, requires political will and political drive. It also calls for champions at the highest level of the public service organizations. And it also calls for*

technical support—those foot-soldiers who'll support the process. Because sometimes we fail not because we don't have good intentions. The intentions are there, they are good, but it's the strategies and the support systems that are put in place.

We were very fortunate as a country in Botswana because we had a political leadership that believed in change, in performance improvement, that bought into the agenda for making improvements for the public service, and part of this really was more out of political necessity. If you look where we sit as a country, Botswana, geographically and politically, geographically we are a landlocked country, and therefore to a large extent dependent on other countries for access to markets and other resources. Politically, as a country, for a long time we have been the island of democracy, and therefore we're able to attract international support and technical assistance.

But with the emergence of other democratically elected governments, it meant that most support had to go to the newly established democracies. All these were challenges that meant that we had to continuously look at the way we do business, find means and ways of improving our performance as the public service and as a country. And out of that was identified a need to improve the overall performance of the public service that was also in line with the aspirations of the National Vision 2016. It was very important that the public service define its role and its contribution towards the achievement of the national vision. Our contribution and our role were defined in the context of improved delivery of public services.

We also realized that, as a country, we were very good at doing national long-term planning, that is National Development Plans, but in between we were also very weak in terms of implementing the National Development Plans. And we therefore recognized that there was a need to have lower-level plans such as ministerial plans, departmental plans, and individual performance plans, and this was among other priorities a gap that our transformation was intended to address.

The Performance Management System that we adopted had a strong aspect of improving planning, so that each ministry in relation to the National Development Plans and Vision 2016 could articulate what its goals and the short-term steps, or short-term objectives, that were necessary for the achievement of the set goals. In order to strengthen these processes, we engaged the Botswana National Productivity Center to be a partner in the transformation process.

The National Productivity Center helped us to train ministries; we had dedicated consultants for each ministry who took each and every ministry through the hand-holding process of training and planning—training and setting goals both long-term and short-term, training in developing measurement tools. That was one step.

The other step we introduced what we called performance improvement coordinators. These were internal ministry consultants. We had external BNPC consultants and internal ministry consultants. These were intensively trained in all aspects of transformation. These were the advisers to permanent secretaries in each ministry. Each ministry even to date has a performance improvement coordinator. The role of the performance improvement coordinator is to help the permanent secretary of each ministry, together with the leadership of each

ministry, to define the long-term and short-term deliverables for each ministry and to put in place a system for monitoring and tracking the performance of each ministry.

A platform for permanent secretaries known as the permanent secretaries Improvement Committee [PIC Force] was introduced to facilitate PSs [permanent secretaries] to meet on a monthly basis to discuss the strategic direction of the reform process, performance issues, and challenges, as well as to share experiences on the transformation journey. This platform has been key to the successful transformation of the public service, as it created a platform for increased buy-in among PSs.

A senior accountability level—the political level—was introduced through the Economic Committee of the Cabinet, and twice in a year ministries report their performance through their ministers at the highest Cabinet level. The reporting is on results-created impact and accountability, and the primary focus for the Cabinet has been on whether the public service is creating the desired results for the country.

We also introduced the Accountability Measures for Performance. At the ministry level, we introduced the Performance Agreements between permanent secretaries and the head of the public service, the PSP. Each year, each permanent secretary signs an agreement with the head of the public service, which says: this is my mandate as the ministry; within this mandate these are the six critical deliverables that—six to eight critical deliverables that I'm going to deliver this year, and this is how these deliverables will impact on the mandate and the bigger mandate in terms of our contribution to the National Development Plan and Vision 2016.

Twice a year the PS sits down with the head of the public service to review the performance of each PS in the attainment of those set goals. And internally within the ministry, the deputy permanent secretaries will review performance with their permanent secretary, and it cascades down the hierarchy. The role of the performance improvement coordinator becomes very critical because he's the internal consultant who works with all these structures to help direct us with specific portfolio mandates, to focus on the delivery, to focus on the measures in place, to monitor and review progress. So it's an empowerment process. But I've always said, and I will always say, it's all about the political will to make things happen, because change is not a smooth process all the time; it can be rough sometimes, and the political will has to be prepared to withstand the storm and focus on the bigger goals in terms of what we want to achieve as a country.

What we also did as part of that transformation: we engaged with another company in the US [United States], the Performance Center, which has been engaged with helping organizations transform. Our engagement with them was to focus more in terms of working on the mindsets of the leadership to prepare for change and to accept change and to engage with change, so that we could minimize the resistance that comes out of the challenges of facing change.

So we had a number of sessions, and we are still working with the Center, but on a different level. We have recently engaged the Performance Center to help us with further developing the leadership capabilities of our leadership, so that our leaders can understand that their role as the collective is to move this public service from this level of platform to a higher platform, to open their minds to

focusing on breakthrough performance improvements which come out of enhanced understanding and self-confidence in their leadership capabilities

We are also working on building the capacity of all the management structures of the public service through continuous training and renewal, because people come and go in organizations; some retire, some move on to other ventures, and some get promoted to the leadership cadres, and therefore there has to be that continuous process. Maybe let me pause here.

SCHER: Sure, yes. A number of things I'd like to pick up on: in particular, you mentioned that change can be rough, and I would be very interested to hear more about that—on whom was it rough here in Botswana, and what are some of the challenges that you face when you're trying to implement these sorts of programs and the types of resistance that you encounter, and how do you go about smoothing over these issues and, as you say, weathering the storm?

NKHWA: *I think the most important thing is to get buy-in at all levels: the political level, the administrative level, and the union level as well, so that we understand the objectives of change and the imperatives for change. That's what we did during the first year of the transformation process. We focused on education, education and consultation. We consulted extensively with our Cabinet leadership. We consulted with the members of parliament; we took them on board. We took the public service leadership at various levels. We also engaged our unions, because we needed for all of us to understand that this is change that is meant to help us realize our vision ideals, Vision 2016 ideals. It's not a change that is targeted at finding scapegoats—not to say that where there is a need to address non-performance, it should not be addressed. The objective and thrust of change is to make improvements for the bigger goal of improving the status of the country and the well-being of citizens.*

We also explained the steps in detail. We also provided support so that people should not be afraid to venture, because they were not too sure whether they would fail or not. The support was in terms of the external consultants from the Botswana National Productivity Center.

SCHER: This is the second part of the interview with Ms. Taboka Nkhwa. Sorry, you were talking about providing support and external consultants so that the people would not be afraid to accept change and take chances on this type of work.

NKHWA: *Yes, that support was both external and internal. Externally, we got our Botswana National Productivity Center to provide dedicated consultants who work in ministries to train on all the key aspects of transformation, such as defining the mandates, such as setting goals, such as putting in place measures and performance indicators, such as putting in place monitoring mechanisms. We also worked with the Performance Center, US-based, to provide training especially on mindset management and change readiness. We also trained extensively in various core-related areas of the various ministry mandates to build the technical and leadership capabilities of ministries. Internally, we also set up structures; at the ministry level we had our performance improvement coordinators. We also had what we called the Ministerial Improvement Committee, which is a ministry leadership committee that oversees the performance of the ministry in terms of the set goals, objectives, and performance measures.*

The Ministry Performance Improvement Committee meets monthly in all ministries.

SCHER: OK.

NKHWA: *And then above that we had a committee of permanent secretaries which we called the Performance Improvement Committee, which was overseeing the key aspects of transformation and looking at the key deliverables from the whole government's perspective, and they were also looking at issues that could be bottlenecks, etc. The beauty and benefit of having a performance in this permanent secretary's platform was to bring in the quality buy-in of the public service leadership, so that they could talk about transformation; they could share their experiences; they could also talk about common challenges and find common strategies for moving forward.*

SCHER: So if I am understanding correctly, in many ways your strategy was to secure buy-in and educate people to try and avert the possibility of resistance, the idea being that if people knew enough they would be supportive of the program. But even so, I imagine that doing something like this must have been exceptionally difficult, and I wonder if there—if I could ask you what you would consider the biggest obstacle you faced to the successful implementation of these various programs?

NKHWA: *I think, first and foremost, it was with all the public education here and there, there would be pockets of resistance for one reason or another. Other people felt that this was nothing new, and therefore, like any transformation or like anything that is new, it will come and go, and therefore they will just stand by the side and allow it to pass. Transforming a big organization such as the public service was also not very easy: the financial cost of transformation was very high; it involved a lot of training, and a significant amount of man hours were lost whilst people were away from offices. This compromised service delivery, and members of the public were sometimes unhappy when they could not get service as people were said to be in training—and of course the results were not immediate, as some people had assumed, and that was another area of frustration in terms of the expected service delivery.*

Fortunately, we had learned lessons from our previous initiatives in terms of transformation; we also knew the things that we did wrong. Among others was ownership and accountability, and this time we made sure that each and every permanent secretary was held accountable for the performance of his or her ministry. The support, internal and external, was provided, and at the disposal of the head of the ministry, the permanent secretary—and therefore, through this review with the head of the public service, each permanent secretary could only speak for his or her performance, and therefore there was no way of hiding about.

The first reviews—yes, there were those stories, but when people realized that yes, we mean business, by the second set of reviews and third reviews, we started seeing a lot of improvement, a lot of commitment, a lot of interest because—human nature being human nature—we want to be seen to be excelling. As a group you can afford to hide behind others, but on a one-to-one it just gets closer to home. That's what we did. And again, politically, ministers were also held accountable at the Cabinet level for the performance of their ministries, and therefore ministers wanted also to see their ministries performing.

This was an added plus for the transformation journey and an added pressure for those in ministries to deliver.

Most importantly, the political leadership, the president and the vice-president, bought into the process, because without the political leadership buying into it, it becomes difficult to push ministers. Without the public service leadership buying into it, the head of public service, it becomes difficult to hold permanent secretaries accountable. So it all boils down to political and administrative will to make things happen.

SCHER: I see, OK—and I'm keeping an eye on the time, and is there time for maybe one more question?

NKHWA: Yes.

SCHER: One of the things that I guess I've been struggling a little bit to understand myself is that there seems to have been a general sort of drive to improve performance from various different people and different levels. And I was wondering, was there a big push from a particular individual? I mean, was it the president or the vice-president who was really pushing this change, or was it just a general collective drive from a number of people such as yourself who had overseas experience and who had seen countries like Singapore and the models that they used? Where was the real push coming from?

NKHWA: *I would say it was collective, starting with the political—the president. The private sector, the private sector association, also dictated for improvements, because without an effective and efficient public service, then the private sector would be compromised. This came out quite clearly in some of the private sector agency conferences. And of course, the head of the public service—the present and previous [heads] made it happen, because without sticking to the one-to-one reviews with permanent secretaries, some permanent secretaries would have lagged behind, which is human nature—but because of the focus and drive from the head of the public service, it made the change to be sustained. And the focus and drive from the president also made things happen. In fact, the former president, who is now retired, appointed the then vice-president, who's now president, to oversee the implementation of government projects and initiatives, and of course this was one of them, which was a plus sign for us.*

So our success to a large extent as a country came out of the political will to make things happen, and also the public service leadership to sustain the improvements. This is what I've always said as a note around the Commonwealth, because it has been a common question. We cannot ignore the contribution that it has made to our sustained success as a country. Because where there is political instability and lack of political buy-in, some people just refuse to do certain things, and nobody will say anything to them. We're also very fortunate that, of course, we don't have a militant union environment like the one that you have in other countries, and we were able to engage with our public sector unions and to establish a common platform for moving our country forward. The unions and employee associations have been supportive of the transformation.

SCHER: Excellent—well thank you very much, ma'am. I know you have other meetings, and I don't want to take up too much more of your time.

NKHWA: *Thank you very much. I'll be happy to answer any questions if you feel that certain things have not been covered. You can send an email.*

SCHER: Thank you very much, ma'am, thank you. I appreciate it.