

Management by Failure—Part 1

I start with the premise that the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers

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After examining many management concepts, I have not come across the principle of management by failure. Yet, it is possible to manage by failure. I have formed the view that given a set of circumstances management can work for several years unchecked, managing by failure. There are conditions precedent to the occurrence of this phenomenon. These conditions allow this style to feed and sustain itself for many years.

I intend to use a series of articles to show its existence. It is my intention to use management of the public service in the Caribbean over the last thirty years as an example of this style of management. A main condition precedent to develop this style is where management possesses divergent objectives. The public service brings together the ideal circumstances that allow this style to thrive.

In part one of this series I will set out the definitions of management, the public service and the framework of public service management. In part two I will use a case study to examine the functions and responsibilities of management in its decision-making role within the public service and in part three I will test public service management on key decision-making success factors and grade them.

General management theory suggest that management is an individual or a group of individuals that accept responsibilities to run an organization. They plan, organize, direct and control essential activities of the organization.

According to Peter Drucker management is: “a multi-purpose organ that manages business and manages managers and manages workers and work.”. Drucker does not explain this. Nor, does he outline the framework for doing it.

Henry Fayol defines management as “to manage is to forecast, and to plan, to organize, to command, to co-ordinate and to control”. Fayol outlines a framework within which management operates. Let us examine each part in more detail using the work of the public service.

The main method of forecasting used by the public service is presenting the annual estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, the Budget, by the Minister of Finance. Line ministries generate this document. The Ministry of Finance compiles it for presentation by the minister to Parliament once per year.

Planning and controlling are done using this document.

The public service is organized according to law. The posts, power and responsibilities of the highest levels of the organization are set out in the constitution. Under the constitution, “The Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of allocation of the Prime Minister, may, by directions in writing, assign to the Prime Minister or any other Minister responsibility for any business of the government . . . , including the administration of any department of government.”

This clause may vary from one island of the Caribbean to another, but the essence of the provision is consistent. In a few countries the Governor-General is called President.

So, the command, co-ordination and control of the public service lie in the hands of the Prime Minister and his Ministers. This arrangement gives rise to the basis of management by failure as I will examine in more detail in the next article in this series.

Failure arises from the need of management to occupy two contrasting and contradicting positions. The manager has to manage the public service and also be a politician representing the dreams and aspirations of his constituents.

Evidence suggests that to succeed the manager spends more time and energy being a politician than as a manager of the affairs of the public service.

In part two of this series I will use a case study to examine this phenomenon.