

Management by failure—Part 2

Hire people who are better than you are, then leave them to get on with it.

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In the second part of this series I examine public service management in its decision-making role. I use a case study to show this management role.

A decision is a choice whereby a person concludes about a situation. It represents a course of behavior about what must or what must not be done.

The case study is out of St. Lucia based on an article appearing in the Caribbean News Now dated 13 December 2017 captioned “St. Lucia government denies wrongdoing in the award of direct contracts”.

The Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act of 2015 governs the award of contracts. The Act sets out criteria under which the Minister may use direct public procurement. In the case under review the Central Tenders Board awarded a contract to company A in the sum of EC\$2.3 million. Later, the Minister award the same contract to company B, to do the same scope of works, for EC\$4 million using direct public procurement. The Minister met none of the conditions set out in the Act that allowing him to use direct public procurement.

The St. Lucia infrastructure Minister does not deny the facts of this case. He said. “There is nothing new - no wrongdoing. There is no illegality about the awards. It was merely a regular transaction”. The Minister instead, insisted on prosecuting the public officers who leaked the documents relating to the transaction.

The Minister faces dual duties and responsibilities. He must manage the public service and simultaneously satisfy the political dreams and aspirations of his supporters. Let us examine the quandary faced by the Minister in exercising his dual duties and responsibilities.

The Minister as a manager must adhere to the Act in awarding contracts. This approach enables an effective, efficient and economic management. There will be full accountability and transparency. Management’s role to safeguard the asset of the public and to ensure due regard to the economy in its use.

But, the Minister as a politician opts for one of the following alternatives.

1. Flex the underlying intention of the Act;
2. Change the Act to fulfill the purpose he desires; and
3. Violate the law.

The politician considers different factors than the Minister in arriving at his decision. For example, the politician may need to satisfy the financiers of his campaign and to fulfill promises

made to these supporters during the run up to elections. The good of the party and its supporters is placed ahead of the needs of the general population.

Peter Drucker sets out a framework for effective decision-making. In this process he outlines six basic steps. According to Drucker, these steps will not make the decision—it will always be a judgment call—but if the steps are ignored, the decision is not likely to be effective nor right.

Drucker recommends:

1. Classification of the problem.
2. Definition of the problem.
3. The specification to which the solution to the problem must satisfy.
4. The decision as to what is right rather than what is acceptable.
5. The building into the decision of the action to be carried out.
6. The feedback which tests the validity of the decision against the actual course of events.

Later more detailed models are available as a framework for strategic decision-making. Genesis Management Consultancy uses the following model:

1. Structure
 - a. Problem Framing
 - b. Objective Definition
 - c. Situation Appraisal
2. Evaluate
 - a. Scenario Analysis
 - b. Option Generation
 - c. Option Evaluation
3. Decide
 - a. Risk Analysis
 - b. Recommend and Negotiate
 - c. Decision and Commitment

In part three of this series I will test the decision taken in this case study against the set criteria.