A Commitment to Professional Reform:
An Administrative History of Executive Development and
Training in the Singapore Public Service, 1959 to 2001

James Low
September 2014

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the College of Arts and Social Sciences, at
The Australian National University
Declaration of Original Work

This thesis is my original work, except where otherwise acknowledged. The data used in this thesis were collected during my fieldwork in Australia, Britain, Hong Kong and Singapore between 2012 and 2013, as a doctoral candidate at the School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University.

James Low
September 2014

Note on Nomenclature / Ethnic Surnames
Because the thesis introduces and discusses characters of various ethnic backgrounds (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian, etc.) it was considered appropriate to indicate clearly their surnames by underlining their family names (e.g. Chan Heng Chee, Lee Kuan Yew). Chinese surnames are recorded in their conventional order, surname preceding the first names, and not in the anglicised mode.
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James Low
September 2014
Abstract

The Singapore Public Service, acknowledged internationally as highly-efficient and one of the least corrupt in the world, has often been overlooked by literature. Yet, the strategic vision and political leadership of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his People’s Action Party government, often attributed for Singapore’s success, still needed to be translated into practicable policies and implemented into programmes by the bureaucracy. A comprehensive examination into the role of the bureaucracy in Singapore’s modernisation is beyond the constraints of this doctoral thesis. This study, using archival research and oral interviews to construct an administrative history of executive development and training in the Singapore Public Service, plugs a gap in the literature and lays the foundation for a future holistic examination of the Singapore bureaucracy.

This thesis argues that the Singapore Public Service used executive development training and as a medium of change to introduce reforms across the bureaucracy. In so doing, the bureaucracy was able to constantly adjust itself to help modernise Singapore. In the 40 years between decolonisation in 1959 and 2001, when the training arm of the Singapore bureaucracy became a statutory board, training and development had been used firstly, to socialise the bureaucracy away from its colonial-era organisational culture to prepare it for the tasks of state-formation and nation-building. Subsequently, civil servants were mobilised, through training and development, into an ‘economic general staff’ to lead the Singapore developmental state in the 1970s and 1980s. The modus operandi in all this was to prioritise the training of the bureaucracy’s leadership corps, to groom an élite Praetorian Guard, who would then disseminate reforms across the bureaucracy. The Public Service for the 21st Century reforms in the 1990s was the epitome in harnessing development and training for reforms across the bureaucracy. The study concludes, not be asserting a template for replication but, offering points of reference for bureaucracies aspiring reforms. The thesis is not an end in itself but offers a basis to start a conversation on scholarship in the fields of history, public administration and Singapore.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADS</td>
<td>Administrative and Diplomatic Service, Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZSOG</td>
<td>The Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Assistant Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASTD</td>
<td>American Society of Training and Development, US</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMA</td>
<td>British Military Administration, Malaya</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAPAM</td>
<td>Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Colonial Office, Britain</td>
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<tr>
<td>COE</td>
<td>Certificate of Entitlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>COSEC</td>
<td>Core Skills for Effectiveness and Change</td>
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<td>CSC</td>
<td>Civil Service College</td>
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<td>CSCG</td>
<td>Civil Service Consulting Group</td>
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<td>CSCI</td>
<td>Civil Service College International</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSI</td>
<td>Civil Service Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSPS</td>
<td>Canada School of Public Service, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSSDI</td>
<td>Civil Service Staff Development Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTDI</td>
<td>Civil Service Training and Development Institute, Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTI</td>
<td>Civil Service Training Institute, Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPM</td>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Deputy Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIC</td>
<td>East India Company, Britain</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENA</td>
<td><em>Ecole Nationale d’Administration</em>, France</td>
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<tr>
<td>EO</td>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESCAP</td>
<td>Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and the Pacific, UN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excel</td>
<td>Excellence through Continuous Enterprise and Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Foundation Course</td>
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<td>FY</td>
<td>Financial Year</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEO</td>
<td>Higher Executive Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDC</td>
<td>Inter-Departmental Charging</td>
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<tr>
<td>INSEAD</td>
<td><em>Institut Européen d’Administration des Affaires</em>, France</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTAN</td>
<td><em>Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara</em>, Malaysia</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPAM</td>
<td>Institute of Public Administration and Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPD</td>
<td>Institute of Policy Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAP</td>
<td>Leaders in Administration Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCS</td>
<td>Malayan Civil Service, Malaya</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFE</td>
<td>Managing for Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Degree of Masters in Business Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>multi-national corporations</td>
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<td>MOF</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
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<td>MPA</td>
<td>Degree of Masters in Public Administration</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAS</td>
<td>National Archive of Singapore</td>
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<td>NIC</td>
<td>Newly Industrialising Countries</td>
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<td>PAB</td>
<td>Personnel Administration Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAP</td>
<td>People’s Action Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>Principal Assistant Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>PGU</td>
<td>Personnel Guidance Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Degree of Doctor of Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMO</td>
<td>Prime Minister’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPPS</td>
<td>Public Policy Perspectives Seminar</td>
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<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Permanent Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>PS21</td>
<td>Public Service for the 21st Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Public Service Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Public Service Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSO</td>
<td>PS21 Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>PWD</td>
<td>Public Works Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Singapore Armed Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAR</td>
<td>Singapore Annual Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASC</td>
<td>Singapore Administrative Staff College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEO</td>
<td>Senior Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESL</td>
<td>Singapore Establishment Staff List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAD</td>
<td>Report of the Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMP</td>
<td>Senior Management Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>stat board</td>
<td>statutory board</td>
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<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>Staff Training Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAC</td>
<td>Training Advisory Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archives, Britain</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>WITS</td>
<td>Work Improvement Teams</td>
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</table>
A Timeline of Key Events

1819 East India Company claimed Singapore, beginning British administration of Singapore.

1826 Singapore merged with Malacca and Penang to form Straits Settlements.

1867 Singapore and Straits Settlements administered by Colonial Office.

1869 Straits Settlements Civil Service established as dedicated administrative scheme of service; renamed Malayan Civil Service in 1904 following British consolidation of control over whole Malaya.

1892 Singapore under Japanese Occupation.

1945 British Military Administration over Singapore and Malaya after World War 2.

1946 Singapore separated from Malaya upon return to civil rule.

1947 Trusted Commission standardised civil service into four divisions.

1951 Public Service Commission set up in Singapore.

1954 Staff Training School set up as first administrative training facility in Singapore.

1955 Limited Self-Government; adoption of ministerial system of government.

1956 Localisation of bureaucracy (Malayanisation).

1959 Self-Government, People’s Action Party won elections to form government; Political Study Centre set up, Staff Training Centre renamed from Staff Training School.

1963 Singapore merged with Malaya and British Borneo Territories to form Malaysia.

1965 Singapore separated from Malaysia to become independent.

1968 British announced early withdrawal from Singapore; amidst economic uncertainty from UK withdrawal, PAP called for general elections in which PAP won all parliamentary seats and 84% popular vote.

1969 Political Study Centre closed.

1971 Staff Training Institute set up; Singapore economy powered by state-led development continued to grow, recording 17.5%.

1975 Civil Service Staff Development Institute renamed from STI, moved to Heng Mui Keng Terrace.

1979 Civil Service Institute renamed from CSSDI; PAP won 78% popular vote and retain monopoly of parliamentary seats at general election.

1980s CSI played key role in nation-wide Productivity Movement and Computerisation Programme; PAP share of popular vote reduced to 63% (1984 general elections) and 62% (1988 general elections).
1991  PAP lost 4 parliamentary seats and witnessed worst ever 61% popular vote at general elections; Deputy Prime Minister: “inculcate greater political sensitivity amongst … civil servants.”

1993  Civil Service College set up.


1996  New Civil Service College set up, consolidating CSI (renamed Institute of Public Administration and Management) and Civil Service College (renamed Institute of Policy Development).

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1 Rationale for Study

Singapore’s modernisation from a colonial outpost to one of the most liveable city-states has been truly spectacular. In 1959 when it was granted self-government after 140 years of colonial rule, Singapore’s gross domestic product was just S$2.1 billion and per capita GDP S$1,306.¹ Among the population of 1.5 million, infant mortality was 36 per 1,000 live births, and literacy rate was 523 per 1,000 persons. Today, Singapore continues to be a small island (710 square kilometres), has no natural resources and relies on imports for all essentials. Its GDP has grown to S$370 billion (A$317 billion), and per capita GDP rose to S$68,541 (A$58,645) even when the population expanded to five million.² Unemployment is 1.9%; infant mortality 2 per 1,000 live births and literacy is 97%. Its multi-racial population - ethnic Chinese majority and substantial Indian and Malay communities – live in harmony and crime rate is low. This stability and modern amenities rank Singapore among the most liveable cities in the world.³

Singapore’s transformation is traditionally attributed to the strategic foresight and political will of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew⁴ and his ministerial colleagues of the People’s Action Party (PAP).⁵ Even critics of Lee, the PAP and the

⁴ Naming convention among the ethnic Chinese community in Singapore places surnames ahead of given names, hence Lee Kuan Yew’s surname is Lee, and given name is Kuan Yew. English names, when given, are placed before the surname, in keeping with Western practices, hence Harry Lee Kuan Yew. For clarity, all surnames in this thesis are underlined.
Singapore political system acknowledged, explicitly or implicitly, the central role played by Lee and his PAP colleagues in Singapore’s modernisation.\(^6\)

However, since this doctoral study of training in the bureaucracy is concerned with a subject in the field of public administration in Singapore, it does not dwell on the country’s political system and the debates over it.

Even so, this thesis argues that the vision and direction of the political élite depended on the bureaucracy to be translated into policies, and then implemented. The Public Service shouldered the heavy work of state-building following self-government. From attracting foreign investment and building factories to create employment, to constructing public housing to alleviate overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, to ramping up education to provide skilled labour for the fledgling economy, every ‘state-building’ task was imperative and urgent. When Singapore suddenly became fully independent in 1965, the bureaucracy’s list of nation-building priorities expanded to include raising a defence force and setting up from scratch agencies of a sovereign state. The ultimate realisation of this grand political vision and strategic foresight rested on the shoulders of teachers, nurses, postmen and other frontline civil servants to be translated into actual public policies and programmes.

The amateurish and perhaps inexperienced Singapore Public Service in 1959, reinaugurated from the colonial bureaucracy when the island became a self-governing state, did not inspire confidence. The newly-elected PAP government found the senior officers seriously disconnected from the population they were supposed to serve.\(^7\) Conditioned to ruling by colonial fiat, these bureaucrats were mostly sequestered in the comforts of their offices and unaware of their milieu. Frontline civil servants were known among the population to be overbearing and corrupt: for instance, “people had to grease palms to obtain licenses, permits, immigration papers, public housing and coveted places in schools.”\(^8\) The prevailing bribe for a quick driving licence in those days, according to one recollection, was $100 to an officer in the Registry of Vehicles.\(^9\)

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Today, however, the Singapore Public Service is regarded as ‘one of the most efficient and least corrupt in the world’\textsuperscript{10} by the United Nations and other international indicators.\textsuperscript{11} Singapore topped a 2013 survey of attitudes towards 12 Asian bureaucracies.\textsuperscript{12} Unlike counterparts in some post-colonial states, Singapore’s bureaucracy has not interfered in the political arena. Unique even to civil services of developed countries, the Singapore Public Service has gone beyond efficiency and integrity to position its officers to ‘anticipate, welcome and execute change’.\textsuperscript{13} From harnessing technology to deliver government services, it adopted concepts and tools like scenario planning and horizon scanning to prepare for unforeseen crisis that may arise in the future, a sign of growing sophistication. Efficient, incorrupt and faceless behind the political masters, the Singapore Public Service is quintessentially ‘professional’ by Westminster standards.

How did the Singapore Public Service professionalise itself? How did it adjust itself to the wide range of priorities through different phases of state- and nation-building? How did the Singapore bureaucracy reform itself to remain relevant through the decades?

This thesis argues, originally, that executive development and training was the medium through which change was introduced into the Singapore Public Service, leading to the reforms and professionalization of the Public Service. It proposes that this professionalization allowed the Public Service to be in the position to carry out the policies and programmes to modernise Singapore. This is an original argument supported by original research and data collection.

This use of executive development and training to successfully change, reform and professionalise a bureaucracy is not seen in any other jurisdiction. It has not featured in public administration literature. This thesis introduces into public administration literature the use of training as a medium of reforms and offers a model for other jurisdictions seeking to reform and professionalise their bureaucracies.

\textsuperscript{12} Political & Economic Risk Consultancy Ltd, “Bureaucracy: Asia’s Best and Worst,” \textit{Asian Intelligence} No. 885, 16 Oct 2013: 3.
1.2 Plugging a Literature Gap

Despite its significance, the role played by the Singapore Public Service has not been fully explored or acknowledged in the growing scholarly literature discussing Singapore's modernisation. Most accounts, even when acknowledging the contribution of the bureaucracy, have used it as a foil to accentuate the strategic vision and political will of Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP leaders.\textsuperscript{14} One analysis of state policy-making, for example, argued that civil servants were so firmly under the control of the political leaders that they had ‘lost their sense of mission and identity’.\textsuperscript{15} Even when complimenting the Public Service with faint praise as ‘competent’, Henri Ghesquiere attributed its ‘creation’ to the foresight and determination of the political leadership.\textsuperscript{16} In so casting the bureaucracy to highlight the political leadership’s contribution towards Singapore’s success, the crucial role of the Public Service became diminished and marginalised.

On the other hand, Chan Heng Chee coined the phrase the ‘administrative state’ to describe the Singaporean bureaucracy’s pervasive role the state’s developmental activities. Civil servants were wielding ‘power and privilege without accountability to the public and who … become the real rulers of the country’.\textsuperscript{17} Seah Chee Meow extended this argument to assert that the ‘administrative state-model’ has been institutionalized over many years.\textsuperscript{18} To be sure, these arguments were not attempting to assert that the bureaucracy had acquired a high degree of autonomy, impervious of the political leadership. Rather, they were positing that the Public Service had served as the recruiting ground for the state’s leaders across both political and economic spheres, and in doing so had become part of the national \textit{élite} without being subjected to any systemic oversight. The bureaucracy, it was argued, was exerting an inordinate amount of unchecked influence over the country and had developed a symbiotic relationship with the political leadership.

\textsuperscript{14} See notes 5 and 6.
\textsuperscript{15} Ho Khai Leong, \textit{The politics of policy-making in Singapore} (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000) 149.
\textsuperscript{17} Chan Heng Chee, “Politics in an administrative state: Where had the politics gone?” \textit{Trends in Singapore}, ed. C.M. Seah (Singapore: ISEAS, 1975) 68.
However, even these ‘administrative state’ arguments were premised upon the bureaucracy being part of the PAP’s grand design. Both Chan and Seah by default acknowledged the centrality of the political leadership in transforming Singapore. The ‘administrative state’ thesis reinforced the growing discourse crediting Singapore’s modernisation solely to Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP. In focusing on political leadership’s primary role in transforming Singapore, the existing literature has not specifically addressed the role of the Public Service in Singapore’s modernisation.

To be fair, there is a discrete body of literature on the Singapore Public Service itself, although much of it is narrowly concentrated on specific aspects of the administrative bureaucracy. Jon Quah has written extensively on its management of personnel, particularly through the Public Service Commission and the fight against corruption.19 He studied the bureaucracy’s ability to implement policies formulated by the political leadership, contrasting this effectiveness with the difficulties faced in other developing countries.20 Lee Boon Hiok, another prolific scholar of Singapore public administration, led the study of statutory boards in the country’s development.21 More recent works dwelt on administrative reforms in the bureaucracy, especially in the light of the PS21 (Public Service for the 21st Century) initiative.22

The existing literature overlooks two important aspects relating to the Singapore bureaucracy. There is no dedicated history of the Singapore Public Service apart from

two outdated accounts by Seah Chee Meow and Lee Book Hiok. Quah’s *Public Administration Singapore Style* was a comprehensive coverage of the Singapore bureaucracy but, by dedicating individual chapters to specific subjects rather than threading them together, he was not aiming to chart the bureaucracy’s overall development. Chua Mui Hoong might have provided a credible history of the Singapore Public Service, except it was an official commemorative volume rather than a scholarly piece and, for that reason, was non-critical and did not adopt an independent academic format.

Also missing from this literature is a review of the development of Public Service capabilities and in particular executive development and training. Training refers to “the process of developing skills, habits, knowledge and attitudes in employees for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of employees in their present government positions, as well as preparing employees for future government positions.” It is “the systematic modification of behavior through learning which occurs as a result of education, instruction, development and planned experience.” Such training in the context of the Singapore Public Service can take the form of equipping employees with specific skill-sets to allow them to carry out their designated functions, such as finance, human resource, record-keeping or IT skills. For employees who are at more senior levels in the hierarchy, executive development programmes can enhance their supervisory or management skills and provide them with the capacity to motivate and inspire the teams and departments under their charge and to contribute towards the Public Service’s broader goals. Training can also acquaint employees with the context in which they have to operate, whether such contexts are the bureaucracy’s distinctive culture and processes, or the socio-political environment of the particular vocation or profession.

All these different types of training, while equipping employees with attributes, knowledge and skills, at the same time build up the Public Service’s capacity to perform its goals. As Herbert Simon pointed out, by preparing members of an organisation to reach decisions that are in the interest of the organisation on their own,

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training devolves the organisation from constant exercise of authority or advice.\textsuperscript{28} Internalising within officers the knowledge, skills, identifications and loyalties of the organisation to act towards the organisation’s interests in their discretion, training allows big organisations to function. This is especially so when organisations grow so large and dispersed over various physical locations, as in the case with the national public bureaucracy, that direct command of the top leadership over subordinate officers is difficult if not impossible. Hence, training, regardless of its specificity, allows a huge organisation like the Singapore Public Service to carry out daily routine functions effectively, essentially allowing the bureaucracy to perform competently.

The literature on the Singapore Public Service has not to date specifically examined executive development and training. Training has only been discussed as part of broader topics, such as personnel management. Several undergraduate-level essays did explore the subject, but these were written two decades ago.\textsuperscript{29} Although there are several more recent theses on the Civil Service College (CSC), the training school of the Public Service, their focus was not on the College’s training function. Instead, these concentrated on CSC’s transformation from a department within a government ministry into an autonomous statutory body, the effects of such organizational change on individual employees and customer service.\textsuperscript{30}

Given the large body of public administration discourse on the Singapore bureaucracy, the absence of a dedicated history on the Public Service and the subject of executive training, is a distinct gap in the literature waiting to be plugged.

\subsection*{1.3 Research Objectives and Questions}

A broad history of the Singapore Public Service needs to be written but chronicling five decades of developments across the ministries and statutory boards.

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that made up the whole bureaucracy will require much longer time than afforded by this thesis. Rodney Lowe’s *The Official History of the British Civil Service, Volume 1*, took 10 years of research and writing before publication. More critically for Singapore, government archival records required to inform such a project, especially for those of security agencies like the defence and foreign affairs ministries, will be difficult if not altogether impossible to access.

This thesis aims to present training as a medium through which substituted change was introduced into the bureaucracy. To make this argument, the thesis presents an administrative history of the various training initiatives and institutions guiding the Singapore Public Service, from its inauguration in 1959 to 2001. Besides assessing executive training as a catalyst to promote bureaucratic change, tracing the evolution of these various institutes plugs the gap in the subject of training in the bureaucracy currently missing from the public administration literature. In a one-party state such as Singapore, which can be sensitive to analysis of its administrative past, a focus on a seemingly innocuous topic such as administrative training can throw light on the priorities and workings of government and enable ready access to archival records.

To impose boundaries on the topic, the thesis focuses on centralised training. As the Public Service is made up of different agencies and wide-ranging portfolios, training for the different functions and vocations can be highly specialised and particular to the respective agencies. Induction training in uniformed agencies, for example, will immediately emphasise command and regimentation while the organisational culture in civilian agencies such as the finance ministry will be more analytically demanding, or for a tourism board more client-oriented. Training for civil defence personnel, for example, concentrates on the use of rescue and fire-fighting equipment, while training for soldiers is dedicated towards the use of fire-arms. Without a common platform for comparison, hence, addressing the diverse range of specialised and particular modes of training can be inconclusive.

In contrast, centralised training brings together personnel of various vocations from all government agencies for common modes of instruction. Examining such universal training is thus more purposeful in assessing broad intents and effects pertaining training across the bureaucracy. In particular, centralised leadership training typically receives inordinate amount of attention in bureaucracies. In theory, such training is dedicated towards the best and brightest of each bureaucracy and

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represents the best efforts towards developing the leadership which will steer the bureaucracy. Secondly, the impact of leadership training has the potential to shape and manage public agencies towards their respective organisational goals, maximising the greatest output from a single source of input. The scope of this dissertation, hence, documenting an administrative history of centralised training initiatives, in particular leadership training, aims to draw out the thesis that training is a point through which change was introduced into the bureaucracy.

Articulating the definition of ‘civil service’ within the context of Singapore is important. Edward Blunt traced the origins of ‘civil service’ to the East India Company (EIC), in the name of which Singapore was colonised in 1819, which used the term to distinguish civilian employees from military and ecclesiastical establishments.\(^{32}\) The 1955 re-organisation saw the newly-created ministries – which succeeded government departments – also inheriting the ‘civil service’ nomenclature. But the need to include statutory bodies structured outside of these ministries gave rise to the term “Public Service” to encompass the ‘civil service’ and these statutory boards.\(^{33}\) Further, Lee Boon Hiok categorized the modern Singapore administrative machinery into three organizational types – traditional civil service, statutory boards and government-owned companies.\(^{34}\) Mobility in appointments of personnel, especially the élite Administrative Service officers, across these organizational types is common, and personnel from these organizational-types do attend common centralized training at the Civil Service College. Naturally, the missions of different organizational-types impose specific training on their respective personnel at the agency level. This is another reason why it makes sense to limit the scope of this study to centralized training.

The study finishes in 2001, far enough in the past not to become entangled in current political issues. But the date is significant, because one of the main training institutions, the Civil Service College, was then reorganised into an independent statutory board. The central institution responsible for training was for the first time detached from a government ministry to become a separate entity. This thus provides a fitting end-point for this study. Further research may subsequently take the narrative further.


\(^{33}\) *Colony of Singapore Annual Report 1955 (SAR 1955)* (Singapore, GPO, 1956) 252. Statutory boards structured outside of the re-organised ministries included the City Council, Harbour Board and Improvement Trust.

\(^{34}\) Lee Boon Hiok (1980) 441. The Constitution states that “the public services shall include (a) the Singapore Armed Forces; (b) the Singapore Civil Service; (c) the Singapore Legal Service; and (d) the Singapore Police Force”. Republic of Singapore, *Reprint of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore*, prepared by the Attorney-General, Singapore, with the authority of the President, 31 Mar 1980, Article 102.
This study aims to chronicle the history of the Singapore government’s efforts to institutionalise executive training. Yet, to merely document the various institutes and training schools will not flesh out their main purposes, or how their roles evolved over time, what training they provided, or provide a measure of their effectiveness and how they confronted the challenges they faced within the larger complexity of government and society. The organisational dimension of these training initiatives and their existence as part of a broader total institution of the Singapore bureaucracy needs to be examined. This will inevitably thrust to the fore the role of institutionalised training in professionalizing the Singapore Public Service. The specific subject of reforming the bureaucracy, such as anti-graft measures or tightening discipline, or factors such as the compact nature of Singapore’s political system or strong political will of its ruling élite, will not be the thesis' focus. However, these factors will be noted as they arise when examining the role of training schools and their impact on the professionalization of the Singapore bureaucracy.

To explore the proposition that training played a critical role in the reforms of the Singapore Public Service, allowing the bureaucracy to facilitate the Singapore’s modernisation, this thesis addresses three sets of research questions:

1. What were the reasons and circumstances that gave rise to the various training initiatives and institutes throughout the history of the Singapore Public Service? This requires us to ask why did the Singapore bureaucracy invest so heavily in executive training and what did the government expect would be the outcome?

2. How did the Singapore bureaucracy undertake executive training in practice over these five decades? This will involve investigating:
   - What were the relationships between these training institutes and their stakeholders, namely the political masters, the larger bureaucracy and the state?
   - What were the objectives and functions prescribed to these training endeavours? How did they carry out these objectives? What were the effects and impact of training upon the bureaucracy?
   - What types of executive training were delivered and what programs were mounted and for whom?
   - What were the changing roles played by these training initiatives as the bureaucracy and state evolved and modernised over time?
What factors and circumstances led to the repeated closures, mergers or even reorganisations of the various training institutes established?

3. Stepping back and taking a long view after fifty years, what were the defining features and characteristics of Singapore’s endeavours in institutionalising executive development and training?

1.4 Theoretical and Policy Significance

This thesis, by highlighting the critical role played by Public Service training, offers a fresh perspective into Singapore’s rapid and extensive modernisation. Existing studies of Singapore’s development have limited their analysis to the role played by the political élite, as recounted earlier. Without diminishing the contribution of Singapore’s political leaders towards the country’s development, this thesis points out that the Public Service played an also instrumental part as the implementation arm of Singapore’s modernisation. Further, this thesis argues that executive development and training was especially important in preparing the bureaucracy to support the development of Singapore.

Examining the importance of training in the professionalization of the Singapore bureaucracy also provides possible lessons and practices that could be replicated or adapted in other jurisdictions seeking to reform their bureaucracies. Although any lessons will need to be contextualised within Singapore’s unique circumstances, there could be practices sufficiently generic for replication in other bureaucracies. Some practices could also be de-contextualised and modified to suit local conditions. Minimally, Singapore’s experiences can offer policy-makers references on the use of training for bureaucratic reform.

1.5 Broad Approach to be Taken

This study approaches the subject as an administrative history, primarily because the genre attends to the rationale of exploring the role of training in Singapore’s public service reforms over time. It is a qualitative research, drawing on archival records and interviews with officials involved as the main approach. It does not dispute the importance of other methodologies but presents one approach to expand the field of public administration in Singapore, and add to the diversity of the field of
knowledge. The methodology adopted for this study will be discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

Administrative history is best defined by Jos Raadschelders as the study of the structure and functioning of government, the interaction between society and government, and ideas about government-in-society. This definition reiterates the importance of locating the study in the proper government-in-society context. The research questions of the ‘whys’, ‘whats’, and ‘hows’ of training in the Singapore bureaucracy cannot be explored in isolation; rather, these factors will be set against the dynamics of the broader society, government and bureaucracy during a succession of distinct eras. To address these various layers of institutional and corresponding time contexts, this study will be guided along by a conceptual framework, a subject discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

Cross-country comparisons also help to situate Singapore’s civil service training initiatives and sharpen its features. Because these constituted examples which For meaningful comparisons, jurisdictions should share characteristics similar to those of Singapore, such as British colonial tradition, Westminster parliamentary system of government, small jurisdictional size, efficient and incorruptible bureaucracy, etc. Drawing up proper specifications for cross-country benchmarking, and more in-depth issues of methodology are addressed in Chapter 3.

1.6 Chapter Outline

This introductory chapter has set out the rationale, defined the scope and research objectives, and laid out the theoretical and policy significance of this study. The dissertation thereafter proceeds as follows.

Chapter 2 discusses the analytic framework guiding this study. It clarifies various conceptual terms, such as ‘training’, ‘education’ and ‘development’. It then locates civil service training in its proper contexts in each case, at their respective intersection of time, across the myriad of political, social, economic and bureaucratic

dynamics. This framework, thus, establishes the contextual ballast to anchor discussion in subsequent chapters.

The methodology involved in researching the thesis is discussed in Chapter 3. It lays out administrative history as an optimal approach to chart the progression of civil service training over time, together with the various institutional dynamics. It addresses the use of sources to inform on the thesis, and discusses the use of cross-country comparisons to locate and sharpen Singapore’s case.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the colonial background to situate the context of the Singapore Public Service for subsequent discussion. As Singapore was claimed by the British as a base for her Far Eastern empire, the remit to the colonial bureaucracy on the island was to maintain stability at minimal costs. This chapter points out that, in that institutional context, training for civil servants was not a priority for the broader colonial period. Executive development and training was, on the whole, not undertaken before Singapore gained self-government.

The next five chapters examine the five civil service training initiatives straddling across five decades. The Singaporean government chose to rebadge its civil service training initiatives regularly to realign its institutional provisions within its emerging priorities and target training constituents of various levels of public officers.

Chapter 5 introduces the initial Political Study Centre (1959 – 1969), set up by the People’s Action Party government to socialise the bureaucracy to the new political operating milieu, under the guise of training. Having served as executive arm of the colonial authorities for over a century, the bureaucracy at the threshold of decolonisation was steeped in colonial organisational culture: its leadership disconnected with the local population, and rank-and-file officers largely rent-seeking and corrupt. Apart from being the vehicle through which the PAP government asserted control over the bureaucracy, the Political Study Centre was the platform through which the political leadership introduced – for the first time – the use of training for political socialisation to reform the Singapore Public Service.

Chapter 6 discusses the Staff Training Institute (STI, 1971 – 1975), set up in the contours of the Singaporean developmental state. The rapid state-led economic and infrastructural development soon revealed the lack of requisite management training among civil servants responsible for planning, regulating, implementing and managing these projects. This was a gap that STI was set up to plug. After a decade of using training for political socialisation, the STI’s role in equipping public officers for the
developmental state returned the function of training to providing technical skills and knowledge for the bureaucracy.

The period 1975 – 1996 witnessed the Civil Service Staff Development Institute (CSSDI) and the Civil Service Institute (CSI) but both referred to the same organisation and hence merit discussion together in Chapter 7. The CSI, particularly in the 1980s, was the point through which reforms, such as computerisation and productivity, were introduced across the Public Service. But the CSI’s maturity into an institution of training for the whole Public Service brought to the fore the dilemma between broad-based training and élite executive development. This tension highlighted the importance placed upon the leadership corps of the Singapore Public Service, and the corresponding role of executive development. The CSI’s inability to offer meaningful leadership programmes resulted in its eventual marginalisation when it was supplanted by a dedicated leadership development institution.

Chapter 8 focuses on the first Civil Service College from 1993 when it was set up until 1996 when it was renamed Institute of Policy Development (IPD). This embryonic Civil Service College brought to realisation a dedicated leadership development centre after decades of futile efforts to develop leadership training programmes. Its establishment amidst various obstacles highlighted the critical importance of political support. As a platform dedicated towards fostering the values and élan of the Public Service, the Civil Service College manifested the use of executive development as a point of introducing reforms into the leadership élite.

Between 1996 and 2001, the two existing central training schools were consolidated under a new Civil Service College, later devolved into a statutory board. Chapter 9 shows that these re-organisations – seemingly a myriad of re-labelling – consolidates the various training functions into a single focal point. The ultimate aim of turning CSC into a statutory board was not an end-goal by itself, but to orientate the training functions to support the agenda for reforms. Therefore, the transformation of the Civil Service College, from its establishment in 1996 to its transition into a statutory board in 2001, was a remarkably purposeful and well-planned alignment of training functions to introduce reforms into the Singapore Public Service.

Chapter 10 concludes the study by first highlighting the key arguments in the preceding empirical chapters. It provides the platform for the whole study – spanning the entire 40-year period under investigation – to be analysed. Some of the pertinent questions that arise include: what were the changes and continuity throughout this period? How might these be explained? What were the key features and factors in the
Singapore model? What is the Singapore model? It explores if lessons and practices from Singapore’s experience can be replicated or adapted in other jurisdictions seeking to reform their bureaucracies.
CHAPTER 2
Training, Development and Education: A Framework for Analysing Institutional Development

To address executive training and staff development across 40 years of evolution in the Singapore Public Service, this thesis employs the aid of a conceptual framework. Executive training and development in the public sector, in particular, involves various considerations and dilemmas. The decades under examination – almost five, even when contained within the parameters of the Singapore bureaucracy in this study – involved a complex interplay of political, societal, economic and civil service factors and dynamics. These forces combined in different ways in each of the eras to influence the nature of training in the bureaucracy. A conceptual framework helps us to identify the focus and how they impact training and development, and unpack the different levels of training and development and ways they could be viewed to develop in the Singapore Public Service.

This chapter begins by broadly defining the conceptual terms ‘training’ and ‘development’ used across this thesis. Then, through a deeper examination of these concepts, key issues of ‘training’ and ‘development’ can be located against the backdrop of their respective circumstances during the particular points in time.¹ In order to help draw out these specific contexts, another dimension of the emerging conceptual framework identifies – on the one hand – the periodization of time pertaining to the Singapore Public Service, and – on the other hand – the political, societal and bureaucratic institutional forces at play. The framework presented at the conclusion of this chapter introduces the main analytical themes allowing us to recognize and later explain the trajectory of executive training and development influencing the Singapore Public Service.

2.1 Executive Training and Staff Development in the Civil Service

One of the earliest definitions of training within the public sector context was offered by William Torpey:

Training refers to the process of developing skills, habits, knowledge and attitudes in employees for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of employees in their present government positions, as well as preparing employees for future government positions.²

The term ‘training’ in human resource development, Michael Armstrong pointed out, is a response an organization can undertake to promote learning among its employees, in

² Torpey (1953) 154.
order for employees to carry out tasks and responsibilities in its behalf. ‘Learning’ in turn is “the process by which a person acquires and develops new knowledge, skills, capabilities, beliefs and attitudes.” Over time, finer distinctions separated ‘development’ and ‘education’ from ‘training’. These distinctions are important because they differentiate the types of interventions and levels of investment to equip employees with different capacities and work-functions.

Synthesizing the discourse on the subject, this study adopts the following definitions on the key conceptual terms:

- ‘Training’ refers to the provision of learning to employees, i.e. equipping them with the knowledge, skills and abilities to carry out their “current responsibilities and tasks.” Training improves individual and organizational capabilities.
- ‘Development’, by comparison, builds up employees’ knowledge, skills and capacities, with the aim of strengthening the organisation’s general knowledge base, and preparing employees to think strategically in behalf of the organization. The knowledge, skills and abilities invested in employees as part of ‘development’ may not necessarily pertain to the current work functions of the employees.
- ‘Development’, in other words, has a longer term and more strategic orientation than the focus of ‘training’ on current work functions.
- ‘Education’ refers to the individual’s learning, with the aim of acquiring knowledge, skills and abilities that can be generalized to different situations and prepare the individual for new responsibilities in the future. ‘Education’ revolves around the learning of the individual; in contrast ‘training’ and ‘development’ are concerned with the needs of the organization. Like ‘development’, ‘education’ prepares for the future, while ‘training’ aims towards meeting the current needs of the organization.

2.2 Dilemmas of Training in the Public Bureaucracy

The key issues of training and development in the bureaucracy are succinctly summarized in the series of questions raised by the British Centre for Administrative Studies in 1963: What should be taught? To whom? By whom? Where? Added to these is also: When? While training and staff development prepare staff to better serve

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their parent organization, training is not without cost. The opportunity cost of employees away on training, rather than attending to the work-functions the organization is paying for, compounds the actual costs of engaging trainers, developing curriculum and the logistics of delivering training. Training and development thus constitute a dilemma to any organization, which has to weigh the costs of training against the benefits training can bring to it.

In the typical bureaucracy, systems of training and development can be categorized into three broad stages:

1. Pre-Service Training, i.e., before a prospective recruit is formally admitted into the civil service;
2. Induction and In-Service Training, which includes all training activities after an officer is formally admitted into the civil service;
3. Mid-Career and Leadership Development, where an officer, after several years of service exhibits leadership potential or is being prepared for greater job responsibilities, is put through executive or leadership development programmes.

These three stages pose dilemmas in the provision of training in the bureaucracy. Before an officer is formally recruited into the bureaucracy, what levels of prior education or pre-requisite training is expected? As Caldwell observed, “the better the job done in the nation’s schools, colleges and universities, the better the foundation for government’s training programmes.” Should additional pre-service training be deemed necessary, despite prior education, how much general pre-service training will be essential – taking into consideration training costs – for the officer to carry out his work functions?

Secondly, what types of in-service training is desired? Who should conduct such training, i.e., agencies themselves, central training units, or external providers such as universities or consultants? On-the-job training – learning by seeing and doing – provides new officers the most immediate learning needed to carry out their jobs. Structured training, conversely, caters to learning specialised equipment or procedures. While specialised training can be outsourced to external providers, thus reducing the costs of maintaining internal capacity, in-house training allows officers to identify with the organisation. Centralised training, then, besides offering economies of scale by concentrating expertise and standardising knowledge and procedures across the

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7 Caldwell (1962) 93.
bureaucracy, also socialises officers to common goals and values, and stronger identification with the Public Service.9

Thirdly, what forms of executive leadership training and senior staff development should be given? When, how and by whom should these leadership development programmes be conducted? The importance of senior leadership to steer the Public Service presently and into the future, i.e. preparing succession planning, sharpens the dilemmas of training and development.10 Executive degree education, such as Master in Public Administration or Master in Public Policy, can equip the officer identified with strong grounding in administration, policy-making and leadership.11 But the high costs concentrated on an individual heighten the question of fiscal prudence; the protracted time away, especially in foreign universities, disconnects the individual from the operating context. On the other hand, in-house design and delivery of high-level leadership development programmes requires investment in a staff college and dedicated faculty.12 The added advantage of a shared learning experience can forge esprit de corps among the leadership cadre and strengthen the sense of identification among these leaders with the bureaucracy.13

Table 2.1 provides a visual summary of the key dilemmas of training and development in the bureaucracy as discussed.

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9 Caldwell’s description of the ‘coordinating’ roles of the central training agency may be limited to personnel administration functions without considering the possibility – and actuality – of such agencies also carrying out training and development functions. Caldwell (1962) 47-48.
12 Caldwell (1962) 103.
2.3 Integrating the Dynamics across Institutional Depths and Chronological Span

Training and development in the bureaucracy does not occur in a vacuum but is necessarily influenced by its political, societal and civil service contexts. To locate the dilemmas of training and development in proper perspective, the context of institutional dynamics and evolution of time impacting on training need to be identified. This study uses three levels of institutional analysis, as shown in Table 2.2:

- The ‘State’ provides the over-arching context, operating as the authorizing environment and setting the geographical parameters for the jurisdiction. It also brings into play the values, social concerns and economic make-up of society that provides the backdrop to the development needs of the bureaucracy. It takes into account events and dynamics in the broader world outside the borders of the jurisdiction, such as global or regional economic conditions, or technological advancements like computerization. More importantly, the ‘State’ identifies the political élite who, in determining the orientation of the ‘State’, shaped the direction and character of the bureaucracy, which in turn charted the dynamics affecting its training. In relation to the subject of training and development thus, the question at this level is: what were the governance priorities during each period of discussion?
Secondly, the ‘Bureaucracy’ anchors the objectives and subjects of training and development within the context of the civil service. The central question of “what to teach” needs to be preceded and driven by the goals, roles and functions set by the civil service, and the qualities and competencies the civil servant should hold in order to carry out these goals and functions.

Table 2.2b Levels of Institutions

- what were the evolving and changing governance priorities?
- what were the government needs?
- what were the key goals and functions of the civil servant?
- what were the needs of bureaucracy and agencies?
Finally, a focus on ‘Training’ indicates how the various civil service schools went about providing the training to make civil servants relevant to the ‘Bureaucracy’ and the ‘State’. The direction, and dilemmas, of bureaucratic training can be summed up in these questions: what to teach, who to teach, when to teach, by whom, and where? \(^{14}\)

**Table 2.2c Levels of Institutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Bureaucracy</th>
<th>Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• what were the evolving and changing governance priorities?</td>
<td>• what were the key goals and functions of the civil servant?</td>
<td>• what to teach? who to teach? when to teach? by whom? where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• what were the government needs?</td>
<td>• what were the needs of bureaucracy and agencies?</td>
<td>• how were the various training institutes serving needs of government &amp; bureaucracy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2.3.1 Spanning across the Chronological Evolution: Periodisation

With the subject extending over 40 years, dividing the time covered into distinct periods enables a more meaningful and closer examination of issues and developments. It makes the project more manageable and enables compartmentalisation and containment. It also allows for a more detailed exploration of the particular circumstances and challenges within each of these identified periods. Other administrative historians have effectively used periodization to assist and illuminate their analysis of significant institutions. For instance, Rodney Lowe’s *Official History of the British Civil Service, Volume 1*, divided the period from 1966 to 1981 into three chronological parts: a background part examining the British bureaucracy from the time of Northcote-Trevelyan (1854) to 1950s; an analysis of the ‘reform momentum’ culminating in the Fulton Report of 1968; and a third part investigating the many twists and turns in the evolution of reform efforts from the Wilson government to the early years of Thatcher’s administration. Periodization provides a structure for researchers to

\(^{14}\) Lowe (2011) 314.
firstly organise their research investigations, and secondly to write a coherent and convincing explanation of developments with some detailed focus.

A more basic and mundane alternative could be to provide a year-by-year linear chronology, but such a simple historical evolution would miss the changing contexts and political dynamics that shaped the various periods and training initiatives. Dividing the period into distinct phases enables the author to investigate particular developments – asking how they came about, who influenced decisions, what enthusiasm or resistance was encountered, what the effects of changing political developments were, and the effects upon the bureaucracy of the broader society at large.

These periods do not entirely depend on the subjective judgement of the administrative historian. In this study, they are derived from the different institutional phases of development of the training function at the centre of the Singapore government (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Spanning Across Chronological Evolution

![Table 2.3](image)

1. These periods begin with the Colonial Era from 1819 to 1959;
2. The period 1959 to 1969 witnessed Singapore becoming a self-governing state, attaining independence and undergoing early state-formation nation-building. This period also coincided with that of the first local training initiative in the Singapore Public Service:
3. The 1970s and 1980s saw Singapore going through rapid economic, infrastructural and social development; against this background was the advent of a series of training initiatives in the bureaucracy;

4. The 1990s saw Singapore emerging as a developed economy, a period which also witnessed evolutions in the bureaucracy’s training institutions culminating in the establishment of the Civil Service College as a statutory board in 2001.

Each period displayed certain energies and synergies, which then fed into the dynamics of the next phase. Sometimes the implication was to build on previous progress; at other times there was a sense things had gone badly and that renewed efforts were needed or training initiatives had to be taken to new heights.

Hence, using periodization this study can more appropriately focus on subordinate operational questions, such as:

- what were the context and circumstances that led to the formation of the respective training initiatives?
- Where did the personnel and staff assigned to these initiatives come from and how were they organised in these institutes?
- How were the actual training activities carried out in these bodies, what did they teach, who were the participants that underwent training and what were the effects of training upon those participants and upon the wider bureaucracy?
- What were the reasons that led to either the periodic closure or reorganisation of these institutions?

2.3.2 The Intersection of Time and Institutional Contexts

The administrative history of Singapore and the Singapore bureaucracy’s training institutions can be demarcated into four broad periods (see Table 2.4):
Table 2.4 Institutional & Time Context of Training in the Singapore Bureaucracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Institutions</th>
<th>Chronological Evolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>1819 - 1959</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colonial Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colonial Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>what to teach?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>who to teach?</td>
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<td>when to teach?</td>
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<td>by whom? where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1959 - 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State-Formation / Nation-Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politically Aware Implementor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1970s – 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technocrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990s - 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politically Astute, Highly Efficient Policy Maker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Juxtaposing institutional and chronological contexts, allows for the interrogation of various dynamics influencing the subject of training and development in each time period. Posing the ‘State’-level question of ‘what were the governance priorities and needs?’ locates the political contexts in the respective chronological discussion. Similarly, asking the ‘Bureaucracy’-level question of ‘what were the main functions of civil servants?’ at each of these time-periods reiterates the central context of the bureaucracy when examining the respective chronological evolution of the subject of training and development. Having set in place these dynamics, we can properly contextualize the key questions that serve the subject of training and development in this thesis: What to teach, who to teach, what policy and delivery agencies to run training and development, when to teach, and where to teach – the main dilemmas of training and development in the bureaucracy.

Table 2.5 brings together the visual representation of the analytic framework guiding the collection, reporting and analysis of data for this dissertation.
In essence, this thesis seeks to use a sophisticated framework to explore the dynamics of executive development and training in the Singapore Public Service. The framework acknowledges the significance of institutional dynamics and leadership priorities and needs, and studies these over a detailed chronological timelines.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology and Approach

This chapter discusses the methodology adopted for this dissertation. It begins by locating the study as an administrative history project, because of the suitability of the approach to address the research objectives. The discussion moves on to situate the project in its qualitative-interpretivist methodology, in view of the reliance on archival-text research and oral history interviews. Finally, the chapter sets up the specifications for cross-country comparisons to sharpen and locate the features of executive development and training in the Singapore Public Service.

3.1 Administrative History and Qualitative-Interpretivist Methodology

The thesis uses an administrative history approach because such an institutional, descriptive and chronological approach is the best way to achieve the research objectives of the study: to explore the role of training in the Singapore Public Service over time.

Authors of several exemplary administrative histories – such as the 19th Century British Foreign Office, the Australian National Audit Office, the British Civil Service – typically do not begin with a definition. But having identified their works as administrative histories, they could reasonably expect an interested audience to already understand what that means. Others though have offered definitions. An early approach adopted by Caldwell stressed that administrative history was a "study of the origins or evolution of administrative ideas, institutions and practices". His framework was reviewed by Raadschelders as relevant but “incomplete and not entirely clear”. Gladden, Molithor, Garcia Madaria and Tiihonen sought to explain administrative history according to the themes through which historians approached the subject: leadership and decision making; organization, structures and institutions; functions, administrative methods, processes and practices; personnel and functionaries; and ideas, theory, doctrines and ideology. But such thematic approaches, Raadschelders argued, cannot sufficiently articulate the essence of administrative history. Similarly,

Wettenhall’s definition of administrative history as the application of historical method to the study of administrative affairs⁵ pointed more to the topic of the methodology than explaining the subject per se.

In seeking to construct an accurate definition, Raadschelders related administrative history with component concepts of public administration: structure (organization), functioning (processes) and functionaries: “the study of structures and processes in and ideas about government as they have existed or have been desired in the past and the actual and ideal place of public functionaries therein.”⁶ Not satisfied with this articulation, he added ‘societal context’ into the mix. Comprehensive as it may be, this rather cumbersome definition did not provide an easy explanation of administrative history.

Ten years later, Raadschelders offered a simple working definition of administrative history: the study of the structure and functioning of government, the interaction between society and government, and ideas about government-in-society.⁷ By charting the nature and evolution of organisational goals, structures, staffing and functions of the training agencies within the Singapore bureaucracy, administrative history draws out the relationships and dynamics with the broader bureaucracy and the society at large.

Qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study because it helps to explore issues such as why certain decisions were taken, to what effects, what changes were made by ministers, by the civil service and its training providers. In particular, the study relies on an interpretivist approach because, when drawing on archival research and oral history interviews, it locates the meaning-making practices of human actors.⁸ This strategy is considered particularly relevant for researching the bureaucracy, as McNabb pointed out, “Interpretive research is important for the study of government organisations and agencies.”⁹ Bureaucracies are not just faceless entities but made up of many people whose beliefs, values and interests drive and shape the actions and decisions stemming from these agencies. In understanding the evolution of training in a large government organisation over time, Rhodes further validated “an interpretive approach constructs the meaning of social actions by

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re recovering other people’s stories.”¹⁰ Their own interpretations and beliefs were important phenomena to recount and study. Further,

Interpretivism encompasses a broad stance toward research, rather than a preference or predilection for word data, as opposed to numbers; it responds more to positivism than specifically to quantitative analysis. That is, analysis of numbers occurs in interpretive research, but looks different rather than carried out in a positivist approach.”¹¹ Interpretivism notes the possibilities of other methodologies, and their potential benefits, to explore the subject matter. Indeed, “no single approach – even if accorded the highly positive label science – is adequate for the conduct of research in public administration.”¹² This study, even when it is the first to explore civil service training in Singapore, is only among many others to come, all contributing to the ‘diversity of approaches’ seeking to expand the field of public administration in Singapore.

This study has employed a combination of extensive archival research and élite/non-élite oral interviews. Government records and officials serving during the various periods under investigation represent a rich lode of information. This study thus emulates Rhodes in “collecting data about beliefs and practices, including historical archives, textual analysis of official documents, biographies, oral histories, recorded interviews and informal conversations… to provide a ‘thick description’”.¹³ The following provides further detail on the specific approaches adopted to conduct archival research and interviews.

3.2 Archival Research

Government documents are one of the most credible sources of information on government policy-making. Government-decisions, especially those with broad national implications, are generally recorded for accountability and to guide policy-implementation across the levels of governments. Historian Kwa Chong Guan pointed out that government documents, as evidence, ground narratives reconstructing the past as objective and credible because “they are records of transactions completed, responsibilities discharged and as such records of accountability.”¹⁴

¹³ Ibid 438.
3.2.1 Singapore Archival Sources

The National Archives of Singapore (NAS), as custodian of the records of the Singapore government, has a huge collection of official files from government agencies deposited with it. Although the National Heritage Board Act stipulates that government records more than 25 years old become “public archives” for reasons of security and policy sensitivity, unfortunately many of these records still have restricted public access.\(^\text{15}\) Rather than the deluge of information overwhelming Lowe when working on British government records, researchers of Singapore history and government generally faced difficulties in accessing archival records.\(^\text{16}\) Unlike the United States, Britain or Australia, Singapore does not have legislation providing for freedom of information requests. Nevertheless, with the passage of time and changing circumstances, the classifications of some Singapore official files have been reviewed and some records have been made available for specific research projects.\(^\text{17}\)

Such precedence aside, this project consciously seeks to avoid the limitations of archival access by adopting several strategies. Defining the scope of the thesis on staff training, arguably a topic that has little security or policy-sensitivities, aims to ease access to relevant government records. To further facilitate archival access, this study adjourns in 2001. In part a reorganisation of the Civil Service College at that time provides a timely break. But this also aims to assure archival authorities that more recent material, which could be deemed more sensitive, was not sought. This strategy has rewarded the author with access to some Civil Service College records. These documents were particularly useful in appreciating the high-level of thinking and planning leading to the inception of the Civil Service College, and the condition requiring no verbatim citation did not prevent the writer from paraphrasing the contents.

While official records may not be readily available, a mine of official information can still be found from government publications in the public domain. Both Singapore’s National Library and the National University of Singapore Library retained large collections of government publications, such as the Singapore Annual Report (SAR) series, continued as the Singapore Year Book after independence, Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates (SLAD), succeeded after 1965 by the Singapore

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\(^{16}\) Lowe (2011) 2 and 12. Loh and Liew (2010) contained frustrations by several researchers in accessing government records lodged with NAS. Kwa and Ho (2010), although “in no way reflective of the views of the National Archives of Singapore” represented a perspective from NAS.

\(^{17}\) For example, files from the Prime Minister’s Office at NAS were made available for Albert Lau to write A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998). See p. vi.
Parliamentary Debates, and others. A particularly important source of information on the organisational structure of the Public Service is the Singapore Establishment Staff List (SESIL), continued as the Establishment List after independence. Annual reports of government agencies such as the Public Service Commission and training institutes, and periodicals such as Bakti and Management Development published by the Political Study Centre and the Staff Training Institute respectively, also offered insights into the dynamics of these training endeavours.

3.2.2 Overseas Archival Sources

As several Singapore researchers pointed out, limited access in NAS need not paralyse research: “By cross-checking and juxtaposing sources from multiple repositories, one could still piece together a relatively coherent picture of the historical episode.”

Britain’s The National Archives (TNA), for one, has progressively de-classified records pertaining to Singapore. As UK was the colonial ruler over the island, files from the Colonial Office (CO) were pertinent for understanding the colonial bureaucracy, including its organisational character and issues such as localisation (also known as Malayanisation in Singapore and Malaya). Given that Britain maintained diplomatic and military presence after Singapore’s decolonisation, the author harboured expectations that files from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence could offer insightful information. But these files provided more background reference, from details of UK-Singapore relations for example, and were not directly relevant to the central theme of civil service training in this study.

Similarly, Australia’s long diplomatic and military presence in Singapore led to expectations that records of Australia’s Departments of External Affairs and Defence lodged at the National Archives of Australia would avail useful data. However, while some files did inform on the flows of Australian-Singapore relations and Australia’s provision of various assistance to the fledgling country, not much was found on training of the Singapore Public Service.

The UK National Archives is also a useful source for researching official records on training within Britain’s bureaucracy. In particular, material informing on the circumstances and considerations leading to the various training milestones such as the Assheton Committee on Training of Civil Servants, Centre for Administrative

Studies and the (British) Civil Service College. These were relevant material, as by tracing the development of training in the British Civil Service, it provided the British bureaucracy as one basis for comparison with the Singapore Public Service.

TNA is also a source for research on Hong Kong, for comparison with Singapore’s training schools. As Britain was the colonial master of Hong Kong, and until as recent as 1997, this writer was anticipating more official records to be found at TNA. Unfortunately, archival records pertaining to the training of civil servants in Hong Kong cannot be located. Nevertheless, a field trip to the Public Records Office of Hong Kong, the territory’s official archives,¹⁹ and the Hong Kong Civil Service Training and Development Institute did provide some material that can inform on developments in bureaucratic training since 1997.

3.2.3 Newspapers as Primary Sources

Reports in the newspapers during the period in question also constitute a major primary source. While some newspapers might have particular editorial slants, their reliance on basic credibility for readership and revenue meant that leading newspapers can be counted upon for objective reporting of facts in key events. This provides a source of corroborating evidence for other sources, including government records, and can even elaborate upon these other sources by providing additional information.

Editorials and opinion pieces in the media also offered a useful source of sentiments among the population at that time. Besides treating newspaper reportage as ‘event evidence’, as Yanow pointed out, editorial columns “might be read for a sense of time – of how people responded at that time to particular events or ideas.”²⁰ In this regard, a useful news media source will be The Straits Times, the oldest established broadsheet with an uninterrupted publication – save for the Japanese Occupation – in Singapore. Other newspapers during the respective periods, including the Singapore Standard, were also reviewed for relevant information.

3.3 Oral History and Élite /Non-élite Interviews

While the value of oral history interviews may not be held in the same regard as official records, these interviewees can be important witnesses to a stage of history. In approaching history, as Wanna et al. pointed out, these actors should be allowed to

speak for themselves as much as possible, to provide eye-witness accounts of the events and sentiments of the period, but their claims should be checked and triangulated for reliability as far as possible.\textsuperscript{21} As a long-time oral history archivist cautioned, oral history sources need to be interrogated through three filters: oral sources are the past as seen by the interviewees; oral sources are the past as interpreted by the interviewer; and oral sources are the past as understood by the listener or reader.\textsuperscript{22}

The 2,000 oral history interviews with civil servants by NAS, under the project ‘The Civil Service – A Retrospective’ were useful in corroborating and elaborating official records.\textsuperscript{23} In view of security and policy sensitivities and also personal and family privacy, many of these interviews had long been restricted from public access. With the passage of time, some of these concerns have been superseded while other interviewees have recognised the value of opening up access to their oral history. The passing of some first-generation civil servants has also led their families to review and open access to their oral history transcripts.

Beside the preceding oral histories, new interviews with senior public officers involved with the bureaucracy’s training schools were conducted for this thesis. NAS oral history project with civil servants was undertaken several years ago, and some of the public officers who played instrumental parts in more recent periods were not included.\textsuperscript{24} The purpose of these interviews was to draw upon as-yet untapped sources and, through integrating multiple perspectives, develop a holistic and detailed description of the events and dynamics pertaining to executive development and training of the Singapore Public Service.\textsuperscript{25}

In selecting interview subjects, a key criterion was identifying ‘privileged witnesses’ in order to extract information as sources for the study.\textsuperscript{26} Most of these interview subjects were listed in various documentary sources, in many instances containing official designations, altogether making them desirable informants. A consideration was the positions they held and roles they played that had an impact on

\textsuperscript{21} Wanna, Ryan and Ng (2001) x-xi.
\textsuperscript{22} Lily Tan, “Archival Strategies for Oral Sources in Southeast Asia: Southeast Asia’s Forgotten History,” \textit{Reflections and Interpretations} (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 2005) 35.
\textsuperscript{23} See National Archives of Singapore, “The Civil Service – A Retrospective,” Web 7 Dec 2011, \url{http://www.a2o.com.sg/a2o/public/html/findoutmore/accq01_06.jsp} for a brief description of the project. Details of the oral history interviews can be found at the National Archives of Singapore’s website at \url{http://www.a2o.com.sg}. Also \textit{ibid} 49.
\textsuperscript{24} For example, Miss Teo Hee Lian and John Ewing-Chow, who between them were directors of the Civil Service Institute from the mid-1980s to the 1990s, were not included in the NAS oral interviews.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{ibid} 17 and 19.
the developments of the various training schools. While the aim was not to concentrate on interviewing élites only, the deep impact of decisions by senior officials on the training schools, and their knowledge into the workings of the bureaucracy, necessitated interviewing officials who held senior positions. Efforts were also made to interview officers at the staff level: apart from gleaning details on the schools’ operation, non-élite actors could offer glimpses to responses by rank-and-file towards top-down decisions in the bureaucracy. These interviews also pulled out aspects of informal organisation which erstwhile may not be documented in official records, such as informal goals, informal organisational structure, and adaptation in activities.

Prospective interview subjects were approached with emails stating the objective and scope of the study, the importance of their participation in informing the study, and assuring them that information shared would be safeguarded and treated with sensitivity. To expand the number of interviewees, a ‘snowballing technique’ was adopted, asking each interview subject to recommend several more key individuals who may be able to assist with information. To temper against security and policy sensitivities, interview subjects were assured that the scope of interviews was restricted to the subject of training alone and until the period of 2001. The 10 year time lapse also allowed them the time to reflect and locate their recollections, though this may result in retrospective rationalisation which could limit objectivity.

3.4 Memoirs and Commemorative Publications

In the past few years, several retired civil servants have published memoirs shedding light on developments in the Singapore Public Service. At least two government agencies have compiled recollections of their officers into publications of organisational ‘war-tales’. In recent times, several government bodies have produced celebratory publications, including the Public Service Commission. While these can simply be dismissed as ‘coffee-table books’, they still have their impact, as noted by

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28 Interviews conducted for this study were within the scope of the Human Ethics Protocol 2011/660 submitted to and approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. Weiss (1994) 35, 25 and 131.
29 Ngiam Tong Dow, A Mandarin and the Making of Public Policy: reflections of Ngiam Tong Dow (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006); Ridzwan, Dzafir, Ridzwan Dzafir: From Pondo k boy to Singapore’s Mr ASEAN: an autobiography (Singapore, Didier Millet, 2009); S. R. Nathan, An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2011).


34 While INTAN is nominally a centralised school, it has seven regional campuses across West Malaysia and, Sabah and Sarawak. These regional campuses have to take into account distinctly different geographical and social contexts of their civil servant participants, even as similar courses are being conducted. See Malaysia, National Institute of Public Administration, “INTAN in Brief,” Web 5 Oct 2011, http://www.intanbk.intan.my/i_portal/en/about-intan/intan-in-brief.html.

35 Rhodes (1977) 5.
bureaucracy. More direct comparison was made with Hong Kong the Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI). There are other small former British colonies with Westminster styles of government and relatively professional bureaucracies, such as Barbados, Botswana, Ireland, and New Zealand. But their locations, entire oceans and continents away from Singapore, together with the diverse cultural and contextual contrasts, complicate meaningful comparisons. Besides, limited funding and specific timeframes for completing this dissertation prevented every potential jurisdiction being investigated in detail. In any case, the purpose of comparison was not an end in itself but to draw out the characteristics of Singapore Public Service’s training institutes, the focus of this study.

In sum, in chronicling the evolution of Singapore’s civil service training initiatives, constant comparisons will be made with similar developments in Hong Kong and other countries where appropriate. The context, formation, objectives, organisational structures, training activities, curriculum, participants, and challenges will constitute the main thrust of the narrative. The intent was not to devote attention to recording or analysing these events per se. Rather, the purpose of examining these events overseas was to contrast with developments in Singapore’s evolution, thereby sharpening the similarities and peculiarities in the training bodies of the Singapore Public Service.


3.6 Merits and Limitations of Sources

The limitations of this strategy must also be acknowledged. Government official records may not be fully frank or readily available, particularly those from more recent years, in view of possible policy or operational relevance to the present period. The relevance of archival records from foreign countries, such as those of Britain and Australia, also diminishes with the scaling back of their presence and influence in the years following Singapore’s independence. Official sources can often focus on the official version of history and not include accounts of what really happened or why decisions were taken.

Oral history interviews and memoirs may have varying degrees of inaccuracy because of the dilution of memories and post-event rationalisation. While the use of English language in oral history and recollections may not draw out the voices of those not educated in English or the illiterate in other projects, the use of English as a working language in the Singapore Public Service frees this thesis from that potential limitation.

Notwithstanding the limitations discussed, all sources which were available were pursued to address the research questions.
CHAPTER 4
Neglect? The Origins of Singapore’s Administration and Administrative Training prior to Self-Government (1819 – 1959)

When the British laid claim to Singapore in 1819, the intention was not merely to seize the island as an end; the goal in appropriating Singapore was to exploit its strategic location as a base to stage colonial expeditions into the Far East. The brief to the bureaucracy set up to administer the island-base was singular, as will be seen in this background chapter: to maintain the island as a colonial base at minimal operating cost. This directive shaped the character of the bureaucracy, and ensured that training would never feature as a priority.

Chapter 4 is not a full exposition of Singapore’s colonial administration, but frames subsequent discussion. This overview of Singapore’s colonial administration begins with the periods 1819 – 1867 when Singapore was ruled by the East India Company and 1867 – 1942 when it was transferred to the United Kingdom Colonial Office. The over-arching directive from the métropole to the bureaucracy in Singapore was to maintain the island as a colonial base at minimal operating costs. Training in the bureaucracy was not a priority. After the Japanese Occupation (1942 – 1945), the late colonial period (1945 – 1959) saw various administrative reforms, including training. But with the British seeking to retain UK authority over the island, training in the local bureaucracy was not a priority. In 1959, Singapore was elevated to a complete self-governing state.

4.1 Administration by the East India Company: 1819 – 1867

In 1819, Stamford Raffles claimed Singapore for the British East India Company, to exploit the island’s strategic location as a base to stage colonial expeditions into China. As a commercial enterprise aimed at maximizing profit, administration was not a priority.¹ To keep costs low, the EIC maintained “the minimum administrative infrastructure necessary for the promotion of economic activities.”² Whether Singapore was reporting to Penang after the 1826 formation of the Straits Settlements, or the EIC headquarters in Calcutta after 1832, the EIC while using Singapore to expand its empire in the region, kept the bureaucracy small.³ The India Office, taking over the Settlements after the EIC’s abolition in 1858, continued to curtail the size of

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² Seah (1971) 4-5. See also Turnbull (2009) 34 & 54.
administration. “Between 1830 and 1867,” Lennox Mills summed up, “the history of the Civil Service in the Straits Settlements resolved itself largely into a struggle between the local administration to increase and the Government of India still further to decrease, the existing staff.”

The EIC used the phrase “civil service” to distinguish its civilian employees from those in the Company’s military, maritime and ecclesiastical establishments. There were two types of civil servants: covenanted and uncovenanted officers. Covenanted civil servants were recruited from England, after securing the nomination of a director of the EIC and signing a ‘covenant of faithful service.’ In 1826, there were just 14 covenanted officers in the Straits Settlements, only three of whom served in Singapore, reflecting the EIC’s persistence in keeping administration small.

Although covenanted recruits were originally put through two years of training at the EIC’s school at Haileybury, essentially pre-service training, the prevailing belief was that formal training – even subsequently in-service – was unnecessary. An English university education was deemed sufficient in preparing EIC officers to administer the colonies. Indeed, after Haileybury’s closure in 1855, covenanted officers were drawn from university graduates without any pre-service administrative training. While officers upon arrival in India did study local languages, this was not compulsory for those destined for the Straits Settlements. Training for civil servants in the Settlements, like counterparts in India, was on-the-job:

On arrival … the young civilian [officer] is always put at first under a man who will look after him, and train him in the ways in which he should go. …. The young civilian must remember from that start that the training which he receives from others is of little importance compared with the training which is obtained by the simple process of keeping his eyes and ears open.

For most civil servants in the Straits Settlements, “information regarding native laws and customs was gradually acquired in the course of duty.” Local studies were left “to individual initiative with no material inducement or reward.” This meant that most English civil servants were barely fluent in the Malay language and few learnt the Chinese vernacular tongues.

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5 Blunt (1937) 1ff.
7 Blunt (1937) 35; Mills (1961) 111
8 Blunt (1937) 201 and 205.
9 Mills (1961) 112.
Morale was low, as the Settlements was not an attractive posting. The dearth of covenanted officers qualified to deal with local issues resulted in the need to recruit uncovenanted civil servants from among local European and Eurasian communities.\textsuperscript{11} Uncovenanted officers were recruited for their local knowledge and administrative usefulness but were subordinate to covenanted officers and had poorer salaries and service conditions than covenanted officers.

With both the East India Company and the India Office focused on maintaining Singapore as a base at minimal costs, the island’s infrastructure soon fell out of synchrony with its growth. As Seah Chee Meow pointed out, “Good administration could not be sustained by an incredibly small budget.”\textsuperscript{12} The local administration, under-staffed and demoralized, allowed municipal amenities to become poorly maintained even as commerce and population expanded rapidly. These, in part, contributed towards the campaign by European merchants in Singapore to petition against the administration of the island from India. As Mary Turnbull observed, the petition to transfer the Straits Settlements from India “made no specific complaints about the Company’s civil service, but many of the deficiencies of Indian administration stemmed from the shortcomings of the bureaucracy”.\textsuperscript{13} By 1867, Singapore and the Straits Settlements were transferred from the India Office to the direct rule of the Colonial Office in London.

4.2 Colonial Administration in the Crown Colony: 1867 – 1942

As a Crown Colony ruled by the Colonial Office in London, Singapore’s role remained as a base for Britain’s Far Eastern empire and the character of the administration in Singapore unaltered.\textsuperscript{14} The remit to the local colonial bureaucracy on the island continued to be maintaining a stable political and social environment, at the lowest possible operating cost, to serve the security of the Singapore base. Seah, in his study, observed that the British in their colonial rule spent very little on the social development of Singapore; their focus was on building up a Singapore as a bastion of the métropole’s broader empire.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} Mills (1961) 115.
\textsuperscript{12} Seah (1987) 96.
\textsuperscript{13} Turnbull (1972) 85.
\textsuperscript{14} Lee Boon Hiok (1980) 437 suggested that the impetus for transfer among Singapore’s mercantile community was really to press for British colonisation into Malaya to facilitate their commercial interests, more than complaints of administrative neglect. Also C.M. Turnbull, “Constitutional Development, 1819 – 1968,” \textit{Modern Singapore}, eds. Ooi Jin-Bee and Chiang Hai Ding (Singapore: University of Singapore, 1969) 183; Tilman (1964) 46.
\textsuperscript{15} Seah (1971) 20 calculated that the British between 1867 and 1937 committed 36% of public expenditure on regime-maintenance roles, 45% on infrastructural expansion facilitating economic development, and
The highest administrative authority in Singapore was the Governor and the Executive Council he presided over. While there was a Legislative Council, without the assent or veto over bills introduced by the Governor, it was not a law-making body as commonly found in other jurisdictions. As the Governor and the Executive Council members were officers of the Colonial Office, British civil servants effectively governed Singapore.

In 1869, the Colonial Office established a dedicated Straits Settlements Civil Service, separate from the Indian Civil Service, but the difficulties in attracting officers to serve in the Settlements persisted. Even after entrance examinations replaced the nomination-patronage system of recruitment dating back to the EIC days, cadets who excelled at the examinations preferred the Home and Indian civil services. In 1904, the Straits Settlements bureaucracy was renamed the Malayan Civil Service (MCS), acknowledging the British consolidation of authority across the peninsula. The creation of a unified colonial civil service in 1934 finally allowed the posting of recruits to any parts of the British Empire, including less attractive posts like Malaya. The Malayan Establishment Office in turn was set up to deploy officers across the peninsula, including Singapore. The sum of these policies contributed to the emergence of a distinct MCS as precursor to the modern Singapore Civil Service.

The Malayan Civil Service, ironically, was not opened to local Malayans. Cadets were required to be “natural-born British subjects of pure European descent on both sides”. Rather than harness the growing number of local inhabitants who attained tertiary education to the task of governance, separate schemes of service were created to stave off complaints of discrimination. Even then, local schemes of service were subordinate to the European-only MCS, with salary scales substantially lower than European officers because, according to the official justification: “Malaya is not a suitable country for the ‘poor white’; unless a European can earn a wage on which he is only 13% on social services. Quah (1996) 290 added that the colonial bureaucracy was so focused on maintaining law and order and collecting taxes that it did not introduce any reforms throughout the colonial period.

16 Seah (1971) 9-11a; Turnbull (2009) 100.
18 Colonial Office (CO) Despatch 5819/12 in Eastern No. 67, para 2, undated, cited in Seah (1971) 12 and Appendix A.
able to live decently as a European should, he merely brings discredit and contempt upon the European community.”

4.2.1 Training in the Colonial Bureaucracy

Such belief in the superiority of the European race, particularly the English cultural background, defined the qualities sought in the colonial civil servant: “strength of character, readiness to accept responsibility, care for the people whom the administrator was serving, albeit at times rather autocratically.” Recruits were drawn from graduates of British universities. The assumption, in the Colonial Service but also held by the British Civil Service, was that a liberal arts education would provide any Englishman with sufficient foundation to administer natives in the colonies.

The pattern of informal on-the-job training continued. New civil servants learned from more experienced officers the local customs and practices, as they adjusted to their duties. When the Colonial Office decided in 1909 that training was needed for recruits to the African Administrative Service, this did not extend to other colonial bureaucracies.

Only in 1932 were all Colonial Service probationers provided with formal training, by means of a Colonial Administrative Service course, which was more academic than vocational. Veterans who had served in Malaya, and favoured maximum preparatory training prior to recruits taking up positions in country, did not find these training schemes beneficial. On the whole, learning on-the-job in situ continued to be regarded as more pertinent. “Even the C.O. [Colonial Office] itself took a somewhat patronising view of the lectures.”

In the 123 years of British rule prior to the Japanese invasion, Singapore was viewed by the métropole as a base for the extension of her Empire. The priority for the local administration was to maintain Singapore as a base at the lowest possible cost. The belief in the superiority of English cultural and educational background meant that the Englishmen needed no prior training to administer over the natives. Training for British civil servants in Singapore during this period was largely on-the-job.

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20 Seah (1971) 15 citing Council Proceedings, 1920, p. C7, calculated that a local officer needed to serve 7 years to match the initial salary scale of the MCS European-cadet, and 22 years to reach the maximum $8,400 annual salary, which European officers could attain within 11 years.
22 Turnbull (2009) 100.
4.3 Administrative Developments under the Japanese Occupation: 1942 – 1945

The Japanese 70-day rout of the British through Malaya was such a piercing stab into the body politic that the colonial administration never recovered post-war. In the meantime, a Japanese-installed Municipal Administration staffed by Japanese civilian officials succeeded pre-war antecedent-departments in local governance.25

The Japanese intended to staff the Occupational civil service with their own, surmising that “many natives were incapable of administrative duties.”26 But with the Japanese Empire stretching across Asia, few qualified Japanese were left to assume all the senior positions in Singapore. In reality, many of these posts were staffed by lower ranking Japanese officials, or even Taiwanese and Koreans from Japanese colonies.27 Lower down the hierarchy, local rank-and-file civil servants were ordered back to resume their posts. One writer observed that the Japanese generals were “more familiar with the art of war than of public administration.”28 Turnbull noted that a shortage of senior administrators resulted in positions being filled by “inexperienced men with inferior caliber”.29 To worsen matters, within the 3½ years of Occupation, Singapore witnessed five administrators.

The inexperienced and weakened administration fuelled the deteriorating wartime socio-economic dislocation. Shortage of staples coupled with non-existent economic planning led to spiraling inflation and black markets. The Japanese suppression of civil servants’ pay in a bid to reduce expenditure had the perverse effect of leading many civil servants to levy commission for services and participate in black marketeering.30

Any evaluation of the Japanese Occupation vis-à-vis the bureaucracy must take into account the endemic corruption among civil servants, which was especially destructive upon the bureaucracy’s institutional ethos. But the British defeat eroded the pre-war deference among local officers towards colonial authority, contributing to the rise of post-war nationalism.31

4.4 Post-War Developments: 1945 – 1955

The British Military Administration (BMA) set up after their return in 1945 further undermined British colonial authority in Singapore. To be fair, the BMA faced immense challenges in restoring a civilian government: chronic overcrowding, diseases, law and order. A sampling of the administrative capacity to deal with these problems can be gained from Turnbull’s comments about the police force: badly equipped and untrained, ill-disciplined and corrupt, and generally hated by the public. But the Japanese legacy of “corruption of public and private integrity” persisted during BMA, evident in the “flourishing gambling dens and brothels … resurgence of opium smoking, universal profiteering, and bribery”.32 When its six-month mandate expired, the acronym BMA had become Black Market Administration to the local population. If Britain’s defeat at the hands of the Japanese exposed the hollowness of her colonial authority, BMA’s incompetence and corruption emptied any moral premise on which Britain could hope to resurrect her pre-war empire.

With the return to civilian rule in 1946, Britain attempted to reassert her colonial rule over Singapore to the status quo antebellum. The Malayan Union scheme had detached Singapore from the Malay peninsular, ostensibly offering Singapore a more liberal constitution. But concessions for the election of local representatives into the Legislative Council were negated by the negligible powers conferred them and limiting voters to a small British-subject minority. In reality, the constitutional ‘liberalization’ was window dressing for Singapore’s separation from Malaya, which was destined for more rapid constitutional progress. Britain’s oblique aim was to strengthen its control and exploitation of Singapore’s strategic location as the hub of her post-war Far Eastern imperial defence.33

The constitutional separation from Malaya detached Singapore-specific departments from the pre-war Malaya-wide bureaucracy. On the one hand, this contributed towards a more distinct Singapore civil service (see Table 4.1). However, in the name of policy coherence across Singapore and Malaya, 11 pan-Malayan departments retained jurisdiction that included Singapore. More importantly, the Malayan Establishment Office continued to manage senior personnel appointments across Malaya and Singapore.34 Although the Colonial Office directed that post-war

Table 4.1: Colony of Singapore Government, 1946-1955

Adapted from Seah (1971) 29.
public services “must to the greatest extent be staffed by local people”36 the Malayan Establishment returned to the pre-war practice of reserving senior positions for Europeans, denying local officers access to the higher echelons of the bureaucracy. The élite Administrative Service scheme in particular continued to be European only and denied to local officers. The British government continued to take the view that colonial outposts were sinecures (i.e., employment sites, for its élite governing class). Discrimination in staffing the bureaucracy was persisting on grounds that locals lacked “standards of conduct and moral values, which are productive of impartiality and integrity, a high sense of duty and service, sympathy and understanding".37

However, such a return to discriminatory staffing was no longer tolerated by local civil servants. In 1947, some local officers petitioned the colonial government for wartime back-pay similar to those granted to British colleagues.38 The government responded by setting up various committees, ostensibly to review specific issues. But the authorities selectively accepted recommendations favourable to them while rejected those sympathetic to local officers. Nevertheless, from among these, the Commission chaired by Harry Trusted, a British judge, standardised the erstwhile diverse schemes of services and various grades into four divisions:

Division 1 were administrative and professional officers with high qualifications;
Division 2 contained officers whose qualifications fell short of those in Division 1;
Division 3 comprised officers holding secondary school education; and
Division 4 contained the manual workers such as postmen, peons, etc.39

Local senior officers were also re-organised at Trusted’s suggestion into the Higher Services Scheme, allowing them entry into Malayan Establishment positions.40 For the first time, local officers broke the monopoly of European officers over senior echelons positions. However, only 14 local officers were admitted into the élite Administrative Service, which topped the Division 1 hierarchy of the bureaucracy.41

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40 Report of the Select Committee on the Public Services Commission (Council Paper 180 of 1949) cited in Seah (1971) 39-40. The Higher Civil Service scheme was divided into Parts I and II. Entry to Part I was based on examinations and selection by the Public Service Commission. Part II officers were promoted from serving Division II officers. Lee Boon Hiock (1976) 110.
The Trusted Commission also suggested creating a Public Service Commission (PSC) to handle personnel matters of civil servants in Malaya. Following endorsement from a Legislative Council committee, a Singapore PSC independent of the Malayan Establishment Office was set up in 1951. The creation of the Singapore PSC transferred control of the island’s bureaucracy from the Malayan Establishment Office to the government in Singapore, a critical step towards subsequent localisation.

4.4.1 Reforms in Training

The training of civil servants also benefitted from the wave of reforms though training reforms spun out of a drive to re-impose Britain’s colonial empire. British wartime soul searching had blamed the loss of her Far Eastern empire partly on the lack of proper training among her officials. Ralph Furse, a senior official within the Colonial Office, argued that the existing system of on-the-spot training was inadequate for the post-war setting: “Gone … are the days when the most obvious task of the administrator was to redress wrongs and to relieve suffering.” The problems of colonial development were increasingly sophisticated, expanding to include finance and economic planning, labour relations, social welfare and land use. Not to be overlooked were longstanding American objections to Britain’s plans to restore her colonial empire post war, and the needs of colonial civil servants operating “under the critical gaze of a much more vociferous and more sensitive international world.”

Furse recommended a three stage training scheme spanning four years for all Administrative Officers of the Colonial Service. A Preliminary Course, providing cadets with a background of their work, would cover Colonial History, Colonial Systems of Government, Tropical Hygiene, native languages, and anthropology “with special reference to the mentality of primitive peoples.” A two-year Apprenticeship followed, where the young officer would work under the mentorship of a senior officer in the field, to acquire an understanding of the local context he was serving in. The third stage, what Furse called the Second Course, would help officers who have served five to seven years understand the Colonial Office’s policies across Britain’s colonies.

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43 Memorandum by H.A.L. Luckham, a senior officer in the Malayan administration, to the CO, undated, quoted in Kirk-Greene (1999) 43.
45 Heussler (1963) 174.
46 Furse (1946) 28.
Furse's recommendation was only partially taken up by a committee chaired by the Duke of Devonshire.\textsuperscript{47} While the Devonshire Committee, which comprised representatives from the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London, agreed that pre-war training was “almost totally inadequate,”\textsuperscript{48} striking the balance between classroom-learning and learning \textit{in situ} was not simple. Ultimately, limited funding and urgency to staff large number of vacant posts with the end of the war weighed against Furse's full training scheme.

The resultant Devonshire courses nevertheless introduced formal training into the Colonial Service bureaucracy. The First Devonshire Course (or A Course) in 1946 sought to “enable candidates from the Colonial Dependencies to reach the standard at which they can be considered on equal terms with candidates from this country [Britain] and the Dominions, for selection for appointments to the higher grades of the Colonial Service.”\textsuperscript{49} Recruits underwent a one year programme in either Cambridge or Oxford universities, covering anthropology, economics, law and colonial administration.\textsuperscript{50} The Second Devonshire Course (B Course) provided mid-career officers with seven months of training through seminars and research guided by faculties at Cambridge, London or Oxford universities.

But debate raged on about the usefulness of formal training. Participants of the First Course actually argued “in favour of ‘training on the job’ followed by a course on the lines of a second course”.\textsuperscript{51} The Second Course also had less than satisfactory outcomes.\textsuperscript{52}

Still, the Devonshire Courses allowed the Colonial Service to keep pace with training policy in the British Home Civil Service. The Assheton Committee had recognised that “the achievement of the balanced judgement, which is the real meaning of common sense in this connection, can be hastened and facilitated by a well thought out training scheme.”\textsuperscript{53} Accordingly, Administrative Class recruits were put through three-month long courses covering subjects such as financial and

\textsuperscript{48} Heussler (1963) 174.
\textsuperscript{51} J.B. Hooper, Supervisor, Colonial Service Courses, London, to O.H. Morris, CO, 8 Jan 1951, TNA CO 877/46/2.
\textsuperscript{52} F.G. Carnell, “Colonial Service Second Course 1949/50,” undated, TNA CO 877/46/6.
parliamentary background of the administrator’s work. However, the prevalent view in the British bureaucracy continued to hold learning from books a ‘crime’ “something that one just does.” 54 Against that context, the Devonshire courses while “no more than exposure to scattered knowledge on a number of subjects…. was an advance on training on the spot.” 55

More importantly, the Devonshire courses provided ‘native officers’ with training opportunities in England. 56 The inaugural First Devonshire Course saw a Malay officer among the 12 destined for the Malayan Civil Service. 57 But only in 1950 did such opportunities training in England cascaded down to Singapore. Four Singapore Administrative Service cadets attended the First Devonshire Course but, “Neither the reports of their supervising tutors nor the standard of work performed since their return were entirely satisfactory, and as a result doubt has been expressed as to the advisability of sending future cadets to the First Devonshire Course.” 58 The colonial authorities in Malaya and Singapore acknowledged that such training “broaden[ed the officer’s] views by his travels outside Malaya” 59, but the actual value of such training was not thought to be anything more than that.

In sum, formal training despite the reforms continued not to be a priority. The motives behind reforming training, in the face of post-war pressures for decolonisation, were really to train up a bureaucracy for the perpetuation of Britain’s empire. Britain’s training reforms to the colonial administration were “carried out in a defensive spirit given that colonies were under attack in the United Nations in the 1950’s”. 60 Even then, to colonial officials in Malaya and Singapore, reforms such as the Devonshire courses in the Colonial Office faraway, were less than relevant or useful.


Meanwhile, the colonial authorities had to contend with the rising mixture of nationalism and frustrations among the local population, particularly the ethnic Chinese majority. As it was, the Second World War revealed Britain’s lack of wherewithal to maintain its over-stretched empire. In contrast to Britain’s declining imperial fortunes was a rising wave of nationalism across its colonies. In Singapore, the ethnic Chinese

54 Lowe (2011) 313.
55 Peter Harris, Foundations of Public Administration (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1991) 194.
56 Heussler (1963) 198.
59 Ibid.
60 Harris (1991) 194.
majority of the population had long been neglected by British colonial policies. Limited job opportunities for graduates of Chinese-language schools and exploitative labour conditions were stoked by pro-communist unionists to anti-colonial fervour. The 1954 Rendel Constitution, conceded by the British amidst heightening demands for self-determination, allowed election of a local government. But Britain retained powers over legal, finance and security subjects. The Rendel Constitution was essentially tailored for a pliant local government cooperating with colonial authorities to preserve British interests, particularly the security of UK bases in Singapore.61

For the bureaucracy, the Rendel Constitution replaced Singapore’s format of government with a ministerial system.62 With the reorganisation of former departments into ministries, the term ‘Public Service’ emerged as a reference to “The Government [i.e. the ministries], the City Council, the Harbour Board and the Improvement Trust”63 the last three being statutory boards created by acts of legislation to carry out specific functions. A distinction was thus made that ‘civil service’ referred to the ministries that constituted the Government. ‘Public Service’ on the other hand referred to the broader organisation encompassing the ‘civil service’ and statutory boards.

The Labour Front emerged from the 1955 election to form a government under Chief Minister David Marshall. Marshall, a Jew and long-time resident of Singapore, had campaigned on the basis of decolonisation for the island. Locally elected ministers, assuming responsibilities over six ministries, asserted the newly-introduced principles of ministerial responsibility and subordination of civil servants to political masters.64 Reporting to these political heads were Permanent Secretaries, the most senior career-executives in each ministry, “responsible for the day to day administration of the Department, for formulating recommendations on policy for the Minister’s consideration and for ensuring that policy decisions of the Minister and the Council of Ministers were put into effect.”65 This establishment of the Permanent Secretary was important as a demarcation thus divided the executive and administrative branches of government.66 The British retained the Attorney-General’s Chambers, Chief Secretary’s Ministry and the Financial Secretary’s Office (see Table 4.2).

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61 Turnbull (2009) 244.
63 SAR 1955: 252.
64 Seah (1987) 103-104.
Table 4.2: Colony of Singapore Government (Limited Self-Government), 1955 – 1959

Among the Labour Front’s first tasks was setting up a commission to accelerate Malayanisation, i.e. replacing expatriate public officers with locals. The Malayanisation Commission recommended localisation of four departments immediately and the remaining 32 departments within five years.\textsuperscript{68} Accepting the recommendations, the Labour Front Government localised six permanent secretaries but sought to retain expatriates in key appointments for 10 years to prevent administrative breakdown.

While the colonial authorities hoped for a pliant local government, the Labour Front Government of Chief Minister \textit{Marshall} manifested the rising tide of nationalism among the population.\textsuperscript{69} In May 1955, striking workers at the Hock Lee Bus Company and sympathising Chinese-school students were so frenzyed by the anti-colonial rhetoric from pro-communist unionists that fatal riots broke out. \textit{Marshall} exploited British need to keep him in position, to prevent re-election of a more extremist government, to press for constitutional concessions. When the British agreed to discuss constitutional development, \textit{Marshall} sought for a fully elected local government.\textsuperscript{70} But the British were not assured by \textit{Marshall}’s ability to contain the communist threat to their bases. Failing to secure ‘independence’, \textit{Marshall} resigned.

The crack-down on communist-front groups by succeeding Chief Minister \textit{Lim Yew Hock} finally impressed the British sufficiently to grant a new constitution in 1957.\textsuperscript{71} Singapore would become a full self-governing state in 1959. A Council of Ministers, presided over by a Prime Minister, drawn from the fully elected Legislative Assembly would exercise jurisdiction over domestic affairs, including the Public Service.\textsuperscript{72}

Meanwhile, the pace of Malayanisation was exceeding the Labour Front Government’s anticipation. Local officers increasingly rose to the higher echelons of the Public Service. By 1957, six of the eight permanent secretary posts were staffed by locals.\textsuperscript{73} Stanley \textit{Stewart}, a local Eurasian, even became Deputy Chief Secretary, subordinate only to the most senior appointment in the colonial bureaucracy.

On the other hand, many expatriates, apprehensive of career prospects with rising nationalism, took advantage of generous compensation to retire early.\textsuperscript{74} By 1957, 175 or 42% of the 416 expatriate officers had retired; another 36 had given notice to...

\textsuperscript{68} Singapore, \textit{Malayanisation, Statement of policy} (Singapore, GPO, 1956) 1.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{SAR} 1956: 271.
\textsuperscript{71} Turnbull (2009) 265-266 and 268.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{SAR} 1957: 288; \textit{SAR} 1958: 289.
\textsuperscript{74} Compensation packages were more generous than those in other colonies. Seah (1971) 125.
The Administrative Service witnessed 55% of the expatriate officers leaving within one year of Malayanisation, including 9 of the 15 super-scale officers. The scramble to fill these critical appointments resulted in the downgrading of posts deemed less important in order to relieve demand on the shrinking pool of Administrative Officers. Finally, 61 Administrative Officers – 22 of these with less than four years of service – were found to fill 65 posts. Reporting to the Council of Ministers, the Chief Secretary responsible for the Public Service assessed:

nothing can make up for the chronic lack of experience in the ranks of the Service. It is clear that the efficiency of the Administrative Service which even now is not good will deteriorate badly. If there was a wealth of experience and ability available in the ranks of the Clerical Service for senior Executive posts, the outlook would not be so grim. There is, however, a dearth of such talent…. The prospect is an inexperienced Administrative Service, but also an inexperienced Executive Service ‘supporting’ it.

The Commissioner of Police admitted that the departure of expatriate officers was two and a half years ahead of his estimate and prevented the Police from “maintaining present efficiency”. Only 576 doctors were available when minimum standards required 1,600.

The exodus of expatriate officers was hastened by growing signs of the People’s Action Party winning power at the impending 1959 elections. Having championed the plight of workers and Chinese school students, the PAP’s popularity among the Chinese working class masses helped it win the 1957 City Council elections. With enfranchisement of 220,000 ethnic-Chinese residents under the new constitutional arrangements, the PAP’s prospects in 1959 were almost inevitable. But British civil servants were “generally perturbed by the success and recent extravagances of the PAP”. In their eyes, the PAP had been associated with pro-communist unions and most notably with violence arising from the Hock Lee strikes and Chinese Middle Schools disturbances. Anti-colonial tirades from PAP leaders like Lim Chin Siong often broadened to attacks against English educated professionals. Many expatriates chose to retire or be posted to other British territories.

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75 Governor of Singapore to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 Mar 1958, No. 43 Saving, TNA, CO1030/647.
78 “Appreciation of Situation in the Chief Secretary’s Office following upon the retirements under the Compensation Ordinance,” File C.S.O. Conf. 3/57, cited in Seah (1971) 24.
80 Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Personal No. 10, 22 Jan 1958. TNA CO 1030/651.
Nationalist sentiments and localisation also had ramifications within the bureaucracy. As Malayanisation resulted in local officers succeeding the top echelons, competing interpretations over the role of the civil service resulted in intra-bureaucratic tensions. One group sought to preserve the traditions of the colonial bureaucracy, including their entitlement to the perks and privileges of expatriate predecessors, the stratification between senior officers and rank-and-file staff, and the political neutrality of the bureaucracy. Another group led by Goh Keng Swee and Kenneth Byrne believed that local civil servants should seek independence rather than adhere to political neutrality and prioritising perks and status.\(^81\) Goh and Byrne soon resigned to join the People’s Action Party to contest for the impending elections but this intra-bureaucratic conflict would have deeper ramifications.

On the eve of the 1959 elections, the Public Service was weakened by the rush to localise, especially among its senior leadership. Out of the 12,584 civil service positions, 2,634 posts or about 9% of the bureaucracy were vacant. 187 of these vacancies were in the Division 1 grades which consisted of the Administrative Service, Executive Service and other professional schemes of service. Many local officers were quickly promoted to take over posts vacated by expatriates, including some not qualified for the responsibilities.\(^82\) Efficiency and effectiveness suffered not just from the inexperience of the top echelons but the hollowing out of middle management to replace the higher hierarchical levels. Although most vacated posts were filled, the Chief Secretary assessed that “the Public Service has undoubtedly been seriously weakened, not so much in numbers as in experience.”\(^83\) Morale also dipped with prospects of serving seemingly hostile political masters: the Chief Secretary had found it necessary to address “reports that some civil servants were concerned about their future after the next elections” and directed:

> Permanent Secretaries, by their advice and example, should ensure that the Civil Service carried out the policy of the Government in office at the time, and that it would be their particular responsibility to establish feelings of mutual trust and confidence with the new Ministers, whatever their party.\(^84\)

The Public Service at the threshold of decolonisation was also pyramidal in personnel structure and stratification (see Table 4.3). Whilst civil servants were organised into four personnel divisions according to their job functions (following

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\(^{81}\) Seah (1971) 70-71.

\(^{82}\) Seah (1987) 100.

\(^{83}\) Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, No. 43 Saving, 11 Mar 1958, TNA CO 1030/647.

\(^{84}\) H. Shaw, Governor’s Secretary and Clerk to the Council of Ministers, to All Permanent Secretaries, and Secretary to the Chief Minister, “Informal Meeting of Permanent Secretaries,” 5 Mar 1959, p. 2, Co.Min.15/55. Vol. 11, p. 2.
Trusted's reforms), this system was also dictated by officers' educational qualifications. Hence, officers in the Administrative Service leadership corps of the bureaucracy and the executive and professional grades were organised into Division 1 by virtue of their high university-degree qualification. Conversely, officers with little or no formal education carrying out manual and unskilled positions were categorised into Division 4. The colonial bureaucracy, on the eve of decolonisation, was very much in the same personnel organisational structure as it was formed a century earlier: a small highly qualified élite presiding over a broader swathe of rank and file officers.

Table 4.3 Personnel Structure of the Singapore Public Service, 1959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division 1</td>
<td>Administrative Service, Executive &amp; Professional Grades (University Degree)</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>4.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 2</td>
<td>Executive &amp; Supervisory Grades (Tertiary Education)</td>
<td>4,628</td>
<td>16.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 3</td>
<td>Technical &amp; Clerical Grades (Secondary Education)</td>
<td>9,841</td>
<td>34.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 4</td>
<td>Manual Unskilled Posts (Little or no formal education)</td>
<td>12,584</td>
<td>44.54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 The Staff Training School, 1954 – 1959

A reform in this late colonial era relevant to the subsequent discussion was the introduction of the Staff Training School in 1954.\(^{86}\) The dismal performance of Singapore's Administrative Service cadets at the Devonshire Course earlier led John

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\(^{86}\) SAR 1954: 213.
Nicoll, the Governor of Singapore, to decide against sending local civil servants to future courses:

it is in my view, certainly for the Singapore cadet, important that greater emphasis should be laid, in any post-selection training course, on the more practical aspects of public administration. One of the main criticisms of the younger Singapore officers is that they are too academic in outlook and too little inclined to apply themselves to solid and detailed administrative tasks and I do not consider the First Devonshire Course is best calculated to remedy this attitude.\(^{87}\)

The need for formal training was not questioned. But rather than classes at the University of Malaya, which his officers were exploring,\(^{88}\) Governor Nicoll wanted, a Training Section in the [Colonial] Secretariat which would take charge of the newly entered cadet. It would be made clear that during this period an officer’s training was to be the first consideration; he would not be posted to any definite duties, but would be expected to devote a good proportion of his time to perfecting his writing and thinking in English and to case work and delving on current files. … the intention [is] to give the young officer by means of instruction and visits, a clear insight into the principles of public administration and the workings of Government departments, public authorities, such as the City Council, Singapore Harbour Board, etc.\(^{89}\)

The Staff Training School was organized within the Establishment Branch in the Chief Secretary’s Ministry (compare Table 4.4 with 4.2). Heading the School was the Staff Training Officer, who reported to the Director of Personnel. As a unit of the Chief Secretary’s Ministry, the School drew from the budget of its parent ministry to run its activities; participants were not charged for the courses they attended at the School.

\(^{87}\) Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 Jul 1953, No. 1004 Saving, TNA, CO 1017/6. Also Urwick, Orr & Partners, Ltd, “Report No. 24, Higher Services (Part II), The Initial Training of Direct Entrants,” undated, TNA CO 1017/6; Han Hoe Lim, Acting Chairman, Public Service Commission, to Colonial Secretary, 4 May 1953, TNA CO 1017/6.

\(^{88}\) “Notes of a Meeting held at 2:30pm on May 8, 1953 in the Vice-Chancellor’s Room, University of Malaya,” 9 May 1953, TNA CO 1017/6.

\(^{89}\) Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 Jul 1953, No. 1004 Saving, TNA, CO 1017/6.
Two types of courses were held at the School – induction and vocational programmes (see Table 4.5). Induction programmes ranged from those for Administrative Service cadets destined for senior echelons of the bureaucracy, to typists at the junior grades of the hierarchy. Vocational courses focused on supervisory skills but also included specific subjects like law, clerical work and financial procedures.

Table 4.5: Summary of Staff Training in Singapore, 1954

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type and Description</th>
<th>Number held</th>
<th>Higher Services</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Administrative Cadet (3 weeks)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clerical Probationers (1 week)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Stenographers/Typists (24 hrs)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Supervisors/Staff Handling (10 hrs)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervisors/Instruction (10 hrs)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Clerical Work Units (3 hrs per month)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Law (15 hours)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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90 Drawn up from A.A. Williams, Deputy Chief Secretary, to multiple recipients, “Chief Secretary’s Ministry – Organisation,” 2 Apr 1955, File PRO 58/55, NAS Microfilm No. PRO 17/957; Singapore, Singapore Establishment Staff List, 1st April 1955 (SESL) (Singapore: GPO, 1955) 1 & 16-18.  
91 SAR 1954: 214.
The most significant training by the Staff Training School was the induction courses for Administrative Service cadets. A typical course spanned three weeks, covering topics like “Machinery of Government”, “Social Welfare” and “Staff Relations & Negotiation”. Half of the 60- to 90-minute sessions in each class of 16 participants would be lectures with the remaining time set aside for questions and discussions. Lecturers were senior officers from the departments responsible for the subjects, tasked “to give the officers attending the course a factual survey of the particular problem or Department, indicating the organization required, the planning involved, and the main administrative problem to be found.” The Public Relations Office, for example, lectured on “Relations with the Public”.

Although its establishment suggested the authorities’ interest by in training public officers, the resources allocated to the Staff Training School were limited. Only a sub-unit of the Personnel Branch in the Chief Secretary’s Office, without its own dedicated budgetary allocations, its staffing was reduced within three years. The Staff Training Officer post was absorbed into the newly created portfolio of Deputy Secretary (Training and Organisation), i.e., the officer had to split his attention between two subjects rather than concentrate on the training portfolio. The School’s facilities were also quickly found to be inadequate:

The library is at present being used as the third lecture room and is therefore most of the time never available for its proper function. Besides, it is not possible to conduct a class of even 8 people in the library (which has only one ¾ h.p. air conditioning unit) for more than an hour without feeling the stuffiness of the room.

This dilution of resources could have impacted on the School’s capacity to proffer higher quality programmes. Indeed, interest in the School’s courses was not enthusiastic. While the ‘ideal’ class size of its Administrative Courses was 16, for example, the two courses in the first year totaled 30 participants (see Table 4.5) and classes in 1955 averaged 12 participants each (see Table 4.6). Over time, the number of Division 1 officers attending courses at the School declined, with a corresponding increase in officers from Division 3 undergoing training at the School (see Table 4.7).

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93 Le Provost to Public Relations Officer, 19 Oct 1955, File PRO 561/55, NAS Microfilm No. PRO 24/1273.
94 SESL 1955: 17.
97 Tan to All Heads of Departments, 8 Aug 1956, File PRO 561/55, NAS Microfilm No. PRO 24/1231.
Table 4.6: Summary of Staff Training in Singapore, 1955

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type and Description</th>
<th>Number held</th>
<th>Number and grade of Officers attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Division 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Administrative (3 weeks)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administrative (2 weeks)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clerical (1 week)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Supervisory (4 hrs)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervisory (2 hrs)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Supervisors / Staff Handling (10 hrs)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Supervisors / Instruction (10 hrs)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Supervisors / Methods (10 hrs)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Departmental Instructors (2 weeks)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Registry Officers (1 week)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Financial Procedure (2 weeks)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Clerical Work Units (3 hrs per month)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: Summary of Participants at the Staff Training School, 1955 - 1958

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number and grade of Officers attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Div. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A source of ‘competition’ could be overseas training, which took up “the major part” of the 1955 training budget. Within two years, the number of officers dispatched for foreign training had more than doubled to 255. Besides cannibalizing into the School’s budget, these overseas training opportunities inevitably posed more attractive options for public officers than local courses at the Staff Training School.

Even when the number of courses conducted by the School grew, the proportion of officers trained in relation to the whole Public Service was small. As a fraction of the total 48,000 officers, the 1,135 officers trained in 1955 constituted only 2.4% of the whole bureaucracy. By 1958, only 3.4% of civil servants had been trained by the School. Evidently, the mode of training for the larger majority of the bureaucracy was informal on-the-job training.

In a review years later, the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury admitted that the Staff Training School “has been looked upon primarily as a centre for elementary

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98 SAR 1955 254.
99 Compiled from information in SAR 1956 278; SAR 1957 295; SAR 1958 308. NA denotes information not available.
100 SAR 1955 253.
101 SAR 1960 41.
102 SAR 1955 252.
103 The size of the Public Service in 1958 remained at 48,000. SAR 1958: 308.
and introductory training … and not as an instrument for training in the higher levels of administration. It has been accepted rather than welcomed by Departments.\textsuperscript{104} Although the colonial government decided to establish a school to train public officers, the resources committed towards this effort was limited. The shortage of instructional staff and inadequacy of facilities might have impinged on the quality of the School’s training. Had courses been more useful to public officers, the demand for and attendance at these courses would naturally be much higher.

4.7 Conclusion

Records indicated that Governor John Nicoll and his staff did not make any comparable references to discussion on training in the British Home Civil Service at that time. Nor were there references to the French \textit{Ecole Nationale d’ Administration}. But as a very senior officer in the Colonial Service, Nicoll would have been aware of the debates ongoing in Britain. While the prevailing wisdom in the Home Civil Service opposed a centralized training facility, Governor Nicoll chose to set up a Staff Training School for the Singapore bureaucracy in 1954. The Staff Training School in Singapore was significantly ahead of the British colonies in the region and even the British Home Civil Service in its time: the Centre of Administrative Studies was only set up in 1963 and only in 1968 did the Fulton Committee recommended the Civil Service College.\textsuperscript{105} Malaysia, which shared Singapore’s colonial legacy, had a similarly-named Staff Training Centre but this was only established after 1959.\textsuperscript{106} Hong Kong, another British colony with similar jurisdictional features as Singapore, set up a Training and Examinations Unit in 1961.\textsuperscript{107}

Governor John Nicoll should be credited for playing an instrumental role in setting up the Staff Training School. However, given his decisive role, would Nicoll’s retirement in 1956 lead to a tempering of high-level attention towards the School? Did this in turn result in a reduction of resources to the School amidst other compelling pulls on the limited budget? Did these developments undercut the School’s capacity to expand the quantity and improve the quality of its training programmes?

The role of the Staff Training School should not be overplayed. The School was training more officers from the junior rungs of the hierarchy, which called into question whether it was meeting the original raison d'être of setting up the Staff Training School to train the Administrative Service and Division 1 officers. More attractive training options, especially overseas training opportunities, contributed to the low number of public officers – no more than 4% of the whole bureaucracy – who attended training programmes at the School. The default mode of training across the colonial bureaucracy was most certainly informal on-the-job training. The impact of the Staff Training School during this late colonial period can only be objectively assessed as negligible.

Summing up, the primary brief for the colonial bureaucracy between 1819 and 1959 was to maintain Singapore as a base for Britain’s colonial empire, and to maintain the Singapore base at minimal operating cost. Through the prism of the analytic framework, the orientation of the state, i.e. the métropole’s goal of expanding and perpetuating its colonial interests, defined the nature of the bureaucracy: a small British élite presiding over a large swathe of locals occupying rank-and-file positions. Training in a bureaucracy bent on low-cost maintenance mode was not a priority, a development not uncommon across other British colonial possessions. Even when the Colonial Office began to initiate reforms in training – albeit to perpetuate colonial rule across its empire – these reforms were regarded by colonial officials in far-away Malaya and Singapore as of little usefulness. Instead, the establishment of the Staff Training School in Singapore customised training to take into local conditions for civil servants working in the island-colony. Still, the departure of the School’s high-ranking patron (i.e. Governor John Nicoll, saw interest in structured training among colonial officials slipping, with the majority of civil servants undergoing informal on-the-job training). The token allocation of resources to the Staff Training School and more attractive overseas training options meant that the School had only a negligible impact on the training of civil servants during this period.
At Singapore’s decolonization in 1959, the new locally-elected People’s Action Party government introduced the Political Study Centre to change the attitudes of civil servants. This chapter begins by setting the context of post-colonial Singapore. Civil servants – having served only the colonial authorities for over a century – were nervous towards their new nationalist political masters. The PAP in turn was anxious to pursue its nation-building agenda and impatient with the Public Service.

Against this context, the PAP government imposed the Political Study Centre upon the Public Service to align civil servants towards its worldview. As the emerging political élite, still consolidating its authority at the threshold of ‘state-formation’, the PAP could not simply rely upon the bureaucracy – in its existing state of apprehension towards the newly-elected political masters – to carry out its governance priorities. The PAP government needed to re-align civil servants from the colonial mindset they were historically conditioned in, towards an appreciation of their new operating milieu. Yet, this chapter points out, this socialization of the bureaucratic élite by the Political Study Centre was not just an end-goal by itself. Seen against the larger political-bureaucratic relationship, the Political Study Centre was among the various measures by the PAP government to assert its authority over the bureaucracy. At the same time, these measures sought to reform the Public Service for better delivery of its policies and programmes.

The fact that civil servants helped to translate the PAP government’s policy visions into actual programmes between 1959 and 1963, when Singapore acceded to Malaysia, attested in part to the success of the Political Study Centre. Civil servants evidently moved away from the colonial era mindset as they helped hasten the pace of public housing construction, improve municipal amenities, lower unemployment, etc. These programmes certainly played a part in persuading the electorate in rooting for the PAP’s referendum for merger with Malaysia, which also saved the PAP government from collapse. More importantly, that the Public Service stayed the course with the PAP government even through the government’s weakest point is by far the clearest indication of the success of the Political Study Centre in socializing the Public Service.

The Political Study Centre, from that perspective, was an initiative by the PAP government to introduce change into and across the Public Service. For the first time, the function of civil service training was extended beyond the equipping of skills and
knowledge to political socialization. But broadening the definition of training to include socialization was at the expense of skills and vocational training which have been described in the previous chapter. The role of the Staff Training Centre set up by the colonial authorities, as the chapter unfolds, was evidently eclipsed by the Political Study Centre. As the Political Study Centre rose in prominence, even called upon to conduct courses for the Malaysian bureaucracy when Singapore became part of Malaysia, the Staff Training Centre was increasingly relegated to training junior officers at the lower rungs of the bureaucratic hierarchy. This prioritization of political socialization over vocational training in Singapore’s state-formation continued even after Singapore separated from Malaysia to become an independent state, until 1969 when the Political Study Centre closed.

5.1 New Political-Bureaucratic Relations: Perception and Apprehension

On 3 June 1959, Singapore became a self-governing state, ending 140 years of British colonial rule. The newly-elected People’s Action Party government, headed by Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister, inherited the colonial government structure (see Table 5.1) and a $14 million budget deficit. The Minister for Finance, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, set out to attract investment and create employment. To sweeten the investment atmosphere, the Minister for Labour and Law, promised to protect workers’ rights and urged them to forsake strikes. To build up manpower for the industrialising economy, the Education Ministry would emphasise mathematics and science. A Ministry of National Development would speed up housing construction to reduce slums and improve public hygiene. With Britain still controlling security and foreign relations, a Ministry of Culture sought to forge a sense of national identity among the population to prepare for full independence through merger with Malaya.

The PAP government was anxious to translate quickly its pronouncements into actual policies, in light of the prevailing political context. While Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and fellow English-educated ministers like Toh Chin Chye, Goh Keng Swee, Kenneth Byrne and Rajaratnam controlled government, they were wary of the threat posed by pro-communists within the PAP ranks. From the PAP’s formation in 1954, Lee and other English-educated leaders subscribed to a constitutional route to independence, through merger with Malaya. But they needed pro-communists like Lim Chin Siong, whose eloquence in the Chinese-vernacular could mobilise the Chinese-speaking majority of the population. The pro-communists in turn saw in Lee and the

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1 SAR 1959: 12; Singapore, Towards a more just society (Singapore: GPO, 1959) 1.
Table 5.1: Structure of the Singapore Government, circa 1959

Yang di-Pertuan Negara
(Head of State)

Prime Minister's Ministry

- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Health
- Deputy Prime Minister's Ministry
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ministry of Labour & Law
- Ministry of National Development

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2 Drawn up from information in Ministry of Culture, *What you should know about (Ministries and Departments)* (Singapore: GPO, 1959).
PAP the veneer of acceptability to the British who retained control over security. Although their *modus vivendi* allowed the English-educated moderates and pro-communists to win the 1959 government, both camps knew an eventual split was inevitable. To stave off the risk of pro-communists instigating the Chinese-speaking into electing a communist *regime*, the PAP ministers needed to quickly improve the lives of citizens. For the task of translating their political visions into policies and services to the citizenry, Lee and his ministers had to call on the Public Service.

The Singapore Public Service was re-inaugurated from the colonial bureaucracy at self-government. At 30,000 strong, it represented about 2% of the state’s population of 1.5 million.³ Too rapid a pace of Malayanisation had weakened the bureaucracy, especially the higher services. By 1959, 405 expatriate officers had left; rather than retaining 267 expatriates in key positions as planned, only 104 remained. The Administrative Service which formed the leadership corps of the Public Service lost more than 55% of the expatriate officers, including nine of the 15 top scale officers.

More importantly, the Public Service was nervous about its fate in the hands of new political masters. It had only served British colonial authority and some senior civil servants had earlier clashed with PAP leaders, particularly Goh Keng Swee and Kenneth Byrne, over whether the bureaucracy should remain politically neutral or help the nationalist movement.⁴ The vast majority of the 1,200 Division 1 officers, including the Administrative Service leadership of the bureaucracy and the professional services, were English-educated.⁵ Unlike the Chinese-speaking majority of the population who voted in the PAP, most senior civil servants were not ecstatic towards the new government. The bureaucracy was naturally not altogether like-minded towards their new political masters, but as Goh Koh Pui recounted:

> Generally the civil servants were not very happy about [the PAP], particularly about their pronouncements about [sic] anti-British and anti-English educated citizens of Singapore. And the civil service being mainly English-educated, therefore they had a strong feeling that their conditions in the government might be jeopardised.⁶

PAP leaders had cultivated their nationalistic credentials by pitching against the colonial establishment, including Lee Kuan Yew and the English-educated moderates, though in more tempered tones than the pro-communist elements. In the eyes of civil servants like Goh Sin Tub, “when the PAP came in, the first fear was really the image

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³ *SAR 1959*: 42; *PSC Report*: 5; Governor to Colonial Secretary, No. 43 Saving, 11 Mar 1958, TNA, CO 1030/647.
⁴ Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Personal No. 10, 22 Jan 1958. TNA CO 1030/651.
⁶ Goh Koh Pui, Oral interview transcript, NAS, Accession no. 288, Reel 11, p. 5.
which they [PAP leaders] had of being extreme, of being pro-communist and of being anti-civil service.” The general atmosphere among the English-educated upper echelon of the bureaucracy, hence, was one of apprehensive pessimism:

There is a certain amount of question mark in my colleagues’ minds and also in my own mind as to what pattern the Civil Service will take in future. With such a strong political party coming in, with a certain amount of antagonism to the old Civil Service which has stood for the colonial masters and implemented the will of the colonial masters, to put it in the language of the extreme left, the running dogs of the British, what future was there for these civil servants?

The fears of public officers appeared to be realised when the new government’s immediate measures seemingly targeted the Public Service. The English-language criterion for entry into the executive ranks was lifted, ostensibly to draw in more talents. Salary-cuts followed quickly, to mitigate the budget deficit, according to the PAP. Although only the top 35% were affected, civil servants protested. S.R. Nathan, a welfare officer in the Ministry of Labour then, related his shock “as the pay cut took away a third of their monthly income.” Postal clerk Lee Gek Seng had to borrow for hire purchase payments. Nathan “wondered if the Chinese-educated left had taken over.” Mohamad Ismail Haji “worried that the communists had taken over.”

Lee Kuan Yew and his English-educated ministers, for their part, were “exasperated” by what they perceived as their civil servants’ lack of “appreciation of the grave challenges before us, and the fact that we had to prevent the communists from exploiting the grievances of the Chinese-speaking whose voting strength was now decisive.”

Senior public officers, it seemed to Lee and his ministers, had become conditioned to ruling by fiat of colonial authority. Sequestered in the comfort of their offices, they had become far removed and disconnected from the local population. To be sure, there were obviously exceptions but such was the impression of the bureaucracy among the population, including rampant corruption among frontline civil servants. Police constables were accepting $10 bribes to turn a blind eye to traffic offences; a driver’s licence could be guaranteed for $100 while back-room-rates for

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7 Goh Sin Tub, Oral interview transcript, NAS, Accession no. 1422, Reel 4, p. 39.
8 Ibid, Reel 5, p. 43.
9 Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates (SLAD) 21 Jul 1959, section 368.
priority allocation of new government flats was $90.\textsuperscript{15} Even office-boys expected between 10 and 20 cents for handing out application forms at government departments. The extent of street-level corruption according to one Singaporean then: “people had to pay [police] officers to get them to investigate crimes. The rich and powerful could bribe the police to get people out of jail.”\textsuperscript{16}

Hence, Lee recalled that, while civil servants objected, the Chinese-speaking majority of the population supported measures \textit{vis-à-vis} the bureaucracy: “Some of the senior officers had to give up their maids – too bad, but the country was facing greater hardships and perils, and we had to convince people that this government would govern in the interests of all.”\textsuperscript{17}

### 5.2 The Political Study Centre

Against this backdrop of terse relationship between the new political masters and the Public Service, the Political Study Centre was established on 15 August 1959. Goh Keng Swee, the Minister for Finance whose portfolio oversaw the Public Service, outlined the need for the Political Study Centre: civil servants “because of past training and background … in the traditions of the British system, particularly the Colonial system … have not been made aware of the importance of keeping in touch with the masses.”\textsuperscript{18} Worst, they were not “able to see how they have been separated from the masses, why that is a bad thing and why it is necessary for them to know what the masses think about political affairs, their hopes and aspirations, so that the execution of government policy can be made more effective.”\textsuperscript{19} Goh clarified the PAP government’s notion of political neutrality expected of the bureaucracy:

> It is not sufficient just to say that the civil servants are there to carry out the policies and instructions of Ministers. When they carry out policies, they necessarily must have a wide sphere of discretion. It is not possible for Ministers to give directives in detail to enable the civil servant to meet any possible eventuality. If the role of the civil service were just to carry out instructions in a mechanical way, … you can be sure that the Government would not be able to make any impact upon the people.\textsuperscript{20}

The Political Study Centre was thus necessary to educate public officers on the dynamics of the political milieu in which policies would be formulated and implemented:

\textsuperscript{15} Yap, Lim and Leong (2009) 175; Cheong (2013) 296.
\textsuperscript{16} Tee Kim Leng, quoted in Yap, Lim and Leong (2009) 175.
\textsuperscript{17} Lee Kuan Yew (1998) 319.
\textsuperscript{18} Quoted in \textit{Straits Times (ST)} 29 Jul 1959: 14.
\textsuperscript{19} SLAD, 12 Dec 1960, section 386.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid}. 
The Civil Servant participates in the democratic state by contributing his skill and experience in running the administrative machinery. He can hardly hope to be an effective administrator if he is unaware of the political milieu in which he must operate or if he is unsympathetic to the long term objectives which the government sets out to achieve.21

Not surprisingly, the Political Study Centre immediately fell under a cloud with many feeling it was set up to indoctrinate or brainwash public officers towards siding with the PAP. Quizzed by the Opposition, the Finance Minister had to assure the Legislative Assembly that the Centre’s training was "completely impartial …. we are not attempting to brainwash the civil service and ask them to subscribe to our ideology, because we rate the intelligence of the civil service high enough to know that such a course of action would be foolish and futile."22 Nevertheless, questions persisted over the role of the Political Study Centre vis-à-vis the neutrality of the Public Service.23 Goh had to repeatedly clarify that the Centre was not intended to indoctrinate public officers: “Surely the civil servants could have seen through it.” The Centre’s name was not helpful. Available sources cannot address the intriguing question, given that Goh, Lee Kuan Yew and other PAP ministers were English-educated professionals, why a more innocuous name was not chosen over the semantically-loaded Political Study Centre.

5.2.1 Organisational Structure and Staffing

The Political Study Centre – located at No. 4 Goodwood Hill, the former residence of the colonial Financial Secretary – was set up within the Establishment Division of the Ministry of Finance.24 Selected to head the Centre was George Thomson, a former Colonial Service officer who “understood what we wanted and soon grasped the part he had to play.”25 Aspersions were soon cast on Thomson being a British spy, and the communist background of the Centre’s other instructor.26 Gerald de Cruz, a Eurasian, was indeed an ex-communist who embraced the “opportunity I’d long awaited to expose – and explode – the Communist ideology and Party tactics from the inside. As a practitioner of Malayan Communism for many years, I knew the

22 SLAD, 11 Dec 1959, section 990.
23 SLAD, 12 Dec 1960, section 389.
24 Ministry of Culture, What you should know about the Ministry of Finance (Singapore: GPO, 1959) 6; ST 29 Jul 1959: 14.
Table 5.2: The Political Study Centre, 1959

Drawn up from information in Ministry of Culture, *What you should know about the Ministry of Finance* (Singapore: GPO, 1959). Organisational units arranged left to right according to the sequence they were presented in the original documents.
Communist philosophy, practice and ‘dirty tricks’ techniques inside out.”28 With Malaya and Singapore embroiled in Emergency against communist guerrillas for the past decade, teaching senior public officers communism is intriguing. To the PAP government, the leadership of the bureaucracy must have been direly disconnected with political realities to warrant such a course.

5.2.2 Training Activities and Participants

The Political Study Centre’s curriculum were drawn up by a committee led by S. Rajaratnam, the Minister for Culture, and comprised several PAP leaders.29 Courses spanning over 2½ weeks would put classes of 20 permanent secretaries and directors through seminars to “make civil servants understand the new dynamic forces that face Asia, and by such understanding transform a colonial civil service into a civil service that will be adequate to meet new needs arising from revolutionary changes”30. A participant of the inaugural course described that,

there were stimulating lectures, lively Q&A [question and answer], and uninhibited discussions covering the general history of East-West relationship, population changes in Singapore, our economic problems, our problems in nation building, communist tactics both here and in the Federation with their threats to Malayan nationalism. Theory and practice were equally studied and political institutions were studies against the background of political thought.31 With allegations of ‘brain-washing’ hanging over the Centre, Rajaratnam stressed that in addressing various political parties in these courses, “we take great care, where we can, to avoid making political capital at the expense of one Party or the other.”32

These courses received attention from the political leadership. Goh Keng Swee was one of the ministers who lectured at the classes while the Prime Minister visited in the evenings “to have informal but very informative sessions with the civil servants, at which questions were freely asked and answers honesty given.”33

29 Lee Kuan Yew, SLAD, 11 Aug 1960, section 572.
30 Cheong Hock Hai, “The first course at the Political Study Centre,” Bakti 1 (Jul 1960): 28. Also Khoo Seang Hoe, for Permanent Secretary (Establishment), to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Culture, “Courses at the Political Study Centre,” 22 Sep 1959, File MC 146 Pt 1, NAS Microfilm AR 8/16/219.
31 Cheong (1960): 28. Also Permanent Secretary (Establishment), to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Culture, “Courses at the Political Study Centre,” 22 Sep 1959, File MC 146 Pt 1, NAS Microfilm AR 8/16/219.
By 1960, the Political Study Centre was organising 16 similar courses a year; a total of 297 civil servants from Permanent Secretaries and school principals to Division 2 officers and teacher-trainees underwent training at the Centre.\(^{34}\)

In addition, “General Lectures” were held on Saturday evenings, well outside the official working hours, typically on issues impacting on the government and the Public Service.\(^{35}\) Between September and December 1959, for example, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew lectured on “The Parliamentary System in a Plural Society” and Goh Keng Swee spoke on “The Ideal Civil Servant in a Revolutionary Situation”. Two academics addressed “Muslim Political Thought” and “Economic Development in Malaya” separately.

Records indicated that neither participants nor their parent-ministries needed to pay any fees for the courses at the Political Study Centre. As a sub-unit of the Ministry of Finance, the Political Study Centre drew on the ministry’s budget to fund its activities.

5.2.3 Bakti: Journal of the Political Study Centre

In July 1960, the Political Study Centre published the inaugural issue of its journal. The title Bakti, was explained to mean “service in the highest form…. [including] devotion to God, love for parents, service to king and country and doing good to one’s community but also any kind of service in the highest order.”\(^{36}\)

Envisioned as a quarterly priced at fifty cents, Bakti’s “articles will aim to be, not the authoritative type which forecloses discussions but the intelligent type which stimulate discussion.”\(^{37}\) The head of the Political Service Centre, George Thomson, urged heads of ministries to write and encourage contributions from their staff. The intended audience were evidently officers who had a grasp of the English language in the Executive, professional and clerical schemes of services rather than street-level or lower-educated frontline civil servants.

The bulk of Bakti’s repertoire were articles from newspapers, essays by academics and transcripts of speeches by ministers and senior public officers. The

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\(^{34}\) SAR 1960 43; SLAD, 12 Dec 1960, section 388.

\(^{35}\) “Programme of General Lectures at the Political Study Centre,” 11 Sep 1959, File MC 146 Pt 1, NAS Microfilm AR 8/16/223. Also Oon Khye Kiang, Permanent Secretary (Treasury), to All Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments, “General Lectures at the Political Study Centre,” 2 Jan 1960, File MC 146 Pt 1, NAS Microfilm No. AR 8 /16/194.


inaugural edition, for example, carried an article by the Minister for Culture, Rajaratnam. Issue 3 included the English translation of an editorial in the local Chinese-language daily. Several issues featured topical interests like “The Emergence of South-East Asia”, “Education and National Independence”, etc. Civil servants contributed reports on courses and suggestions on policies. But the most prolific writer was Thomson, whose articles featured in almost every edition of the journal.

A fair assessment of Bakti is difficult without the availability of its circulation data. It was not conceived as a commercial undertaking and, without a proper publishing infrastructure, Thomson had to solicit for “volunteers [read: free of charge] in each Department who will distribute and sell the copies for us.” Notably, Bakti’s publication fell behind schedule, with the fourth edition late by a year.

5.2.4 Responses of Officials to the Political Study Centre

No official evaluations of the Political Study Centre are currently available but impressions can be drawn from the recollections of some civil servants. Tan Chok Kian remembered, “most civil servants, I think, took it well. Of course they said, ‘Well, we’re all going back to school. We’re going to be brainwashed, what have you.’ but I would say generally it was an eye-opener.” Ngiam Tong Dow said: “I would not use the word ‘brain-wash’. It was changing the mindset of the old Singapore civil servants.”

Most officers acknowledged a better appreciation of the political milieu and roles they had to play in that context. Teo Kah Leong, then-Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of National Development, recalled leaving the Political Study Centre initiated into “the background and principles of the communist regimes [and] communism. …

44 The second and third issues were published in November 1960 and April 1961, months behind Thomson’s original timeline of 1 Oct 1960 and 1 Jan 1961 respectively. Ibid, Bakti 2 (Nov 1960); Bakti 3 (Apr 1961).
45 Tan Chok Kian Oral interview transcript, NAS, Accession no. 1400, Reel 3, p. 20.
46 Ngiam Tong Dow, Interview with Author, 10 Jan 2013. Also Goh Sin Tub, Oral interview transcript, Reel 4, pp. 39-40.
Many of us in those days were very vague about communism.”  Vernon Palmer remembered his stint at the Centre helped him “to understand the Communist’s mind”. Such candid acknowledgement of their ‘vague’ conceptions of communism among top level public officers thus justified the rationale for the Political Study Centre.

Ngiam Tong Dow thought that “the Political Study Centre was the game changer: “Because it changed the mindset: you are no longer the masters, now you are the servants of the people.”

Tan Chok Kian said,

It really gave the civil servants or most civil servants a new outlook, a new dimension of what life was, what the new environment was. Whilst you [as a civil servant] are apolitical, but you had to know more about politics that henceforth the government is going to be governed by politicians with ideologies but different party philosophies and ideas and so on. … it was just not the case of sitting in your offices and handing out decisions, that you had to get to know what’s going on down at the grassroots levels.

Teo Kah Leong remembered that,

We began to realise that while we are taking decisions, we had to consider not only the technical aspects of the problem, we had to consider the political aspect as well. … Yes, [we were] more accountable to the people. Sort of made us an extension of the politicians. We became an extension of the politicians. The only difference was that we handled the machinery of government. And they handled the policy side. … We had to work very closely with the politicians and whenever we made recommendations, we also had to weigh the purely, shall we say, the technical aspects of the matter against the political side, to weigh the two together.

In the light of their stints at the Political Study Centre, civil servants’ conceptualisation of the bureaucracy’s political neutrality was best reflected by Ngiam Tong Dow:

In the tradition of the British civil service, I am political but not partisan. There is separation between the state and the executive. The executive, however, has to remember that our duty is to implement the will of the people manifested through the elected prime minister.

This was in line with the tenets of Westminster political neutrality summed up by Kernaghan and Langford: politicians make policy decisions and public servants execute those decisions; meritocracy rather than political affiliation as the basis of public servants’ appointment and promotion; public servants advise ministers in private

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47 Teo Kah Leong, Oral interview transcript, NAS, Accession no. 1431, Reel 4, p. 38. Emphasis mine.
48 Palmer, Oral interview transcript, pp. 72-73.
49 Ngiam Tong Dow, Interview with Author, 10 Jan 2013.
50 Tan Chok Kian, Oral interview transcript, pp. 20-21.
51 Teo Kah Leong, Oral interview transcript, p. 39.
while ministers accept responsibility for departmental actions. \(^{53}\) Ridley elucidated the tradition of the civil servant’s identification with successive political masters in Westminster systems: “the British civil servant is expected to be a chameleon changing colour as government change.” \(^{54}\) Rhodes, Wanna and Weller elucidated the non-partisan and professional traditions of Westminster bureaucracies as eschewing “direct involvement in political life”, that is, “Civil servants did not run for office, give political speeches, or campaign for one side or the other.” \(^{55}\) Hence, while the socialisation efforts at the Political Study Centre were criticised, particularly by the opposition in the Legislative Assembly, they did not appear to deviate from the principles expected of the bureaucracy in Westminster systems of government.

One year on, the Minister for Finance was satisfied with the results:

The senior officers who went through these courses – many of them for the first time – understand now why Government policy is what it is, and they are therefore able to exercise their own initiative in promoting our policies instead of being jogged along by their Ministers. \(^{56}\)

### 5.3 State Formation

The establishment of the Political Study Centre together with the range of seemingly harsh measures by the PAP government upon the bureaucracy can be better appreciated in the context of a nascent state in the throes of ‘state-formation’. ‘State-formation’ theorists led by Stein Rokkan and Charles Tilly observed that as states in Europe were formed, they underwent phases of ‘penetration’ and ‘standardisation’. ‘Penetration’ is defined by these scholars as the actions of the emerging élite to establish their presence, impose their authority and assert their control over a territory. \(^{57}\) ‘Standardisation’ refers to the forging of a common culture across the territory. The cultivation of a shared identity among the population towards the state gives rise to the ‘nation’. While ‘state’ refers to a defined territory where ruling élite exercises its authority at will upon the population, ‘nation’ is a progression of the

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\(^{56}\) SLAD, 12 Dec 1960, section 388.

‘state’ where the population actively identifies with and participates in the state. ‘Standardisation’ measures, hence also known as ‘nation-building’, could include the imposition, use and presence of similar administrative procedures, identification documents, statistical system of classifying people into sub-categories according to geographical regions or racial typologies, integrated curricula for schools, network of public offices, uniforms for public officers, etc.

In all these processes, the bureaucracy played a defining role as agent of the state. By erecting and maintaining government offices and infrastructure such as post offices and utilities, and by enforcement actions especially through the use or threat of force, civil servants serve as instruments for ‘penetrating’ the state’s authority across the territory. Similarly, state officers in insisting that the population adhere to common prescribed administrative procedures and identification documents, by propagating common educational curricula in schools, through wearing a common set of uniforms and accoutrements, etc., homogenise a population into a ‘standardised’ culture.

State-formation theorists expanded other aspects of state- and nation-building, such as ‘accommodation’, ‘participation’, ‘redistribution’, etc. Some of these terms are used by different scholars to describe similar or overlapping aspects. But the current context of analysis, when Singapore was in its early years of state-building, focuses this discussion on the initial ‘penetration’ and ‘standardisation’ phases of state-building.

Examined against the framework of ‘state-formation’ theory, socialisation and other measures by the PAP government vis-à-vis the Public Service were manifestation of the ‘penetration’ process. As the emerging élite, the PAP was still insecure politically. The seemingly punitive measures were, in Goh Sin Tub’s words:

to tell the Civil Service: ‘This shows you who is boss. We are the piper and we call the tune.’ …. a punishment if you like, a stroke of the cane if you like, which the PAP had to administer, and to administer in fulfilment of its promise to their text that it had made against the Civil Service. And it was salutary. Once and for all. One stroke of the cane and it’s all over. Then immediately after that, the whole programme to win over the Civil Service, setting up the Political Study Centre, training, brainwashing, if you like, the senior civil servants and the down the line.\textsuperscript{58}

But these measures also manifested a ‘standardisation’ effect: by bridging public officers’ disconnect with the citizenry, these measures sought to forge a common identity among the population. Similarly, while the Political Study Centre’s socialisation of public officers was evidently ‘penetrative’, to stamp the PAP government’s authority

\textsuperscript{58} Goh Sin Tub, Oral interview transcript, Reel 5, p. 45.
over the bureaucracy, it also sought to ‘standardise’ the public officers, drawing them closer to the citizenry they were supposed to serve.

5.4 Reining in and Reforming the Public Service

Seen in this light, the Political Study Centre and other government measures taken toward the Public Service served the simultaneous aims of ‘showing who’s boss’ and introducing genuine reforms. Indeed, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew located the Political Study Centre within a larger ‘effort to bring the administration to the people’:

A most significant change in the past year is the conscious effort to bring the administration to the people. A Political Study Centre was started to educate and explain our political and ideological problems to the administrative officers of the state. Senior officers were asked to rethink our political problems. Counter clerks and other officials who deal with the public now understand that they are servants and not masters of the people. And the police have been brought down to the people to be their friend and protector, not their guardian and punisher. … This is a constant and continuing process, and the work must go on. But after one year, there are clear signs that the position has changed for the better.59

In October 1959, the PAP government mounted Operation Pantai Chantek to clean up public parks. The idea hailed from Ong Eng Guan, the Minister for National Development, “a copycat exercise borrowed from the communists – ostentatious mobilisation of everyone including ministers to toil with their hands and soil their clothes in order to serve the people.”60 Civil servants, for their part, were expected “to contribute in a small way to help in beautifying the new State of Singapore and would add a positive contribution for the welfare of the common people.”61 Making public officers leave the comfort of their offices to undertake physical labour in front of the public was undoubtedly another assertion of authority by the PAP government over the bureaucracy. Having public officers worked among citizens also drove home the message that public servants were meant to serve the public.

By 1960, the PAP government was tightening its control over public officers. The Prevention of Corruption Ordinance increased penalties for graft.62

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60 Lee Kuan Yew (1998) 322.
61 Chairman, Organising Committee, Operation Pantai Chantek, to Permanent Secretary (PS), Ministry of Culture, ‘Operation ‘Pantai Chantek’,’ 19 Oct 1959, File MC 132, NAS Microfilm AR 8/16/194; Memo from Chairman, Organising committee, Operation Pantai Chantek to Chairman to Singapore Telephone Board, Singapore Harbour Board, Singapore Polytechnic, Ministries and other organisations, 12 Oct 1959, File MC 132, NAS Microfilm AR 8/16/194.
Service Commission was empowered to initiate disciplinary proceedings against errant staff; permanent secretaries could punish against officers for being discourteous to the public. In 1962, a Central Complaints Bureau allowed citizens to lodge complaints against public officers who were rude or misbehaved towards them.

Summing up the PAP government’s intentions, Finance Minister Goh Keng Swee pointed out that civil servants needed to move away from the colonial mindset:

The people are now the real masters of the Government, whose responsibility is to serve the people. The people are the real employers of the public servants and the payers of their salaries. Therefore, it is only right that public servants should be courteous to the public in the performance of their duties. But in order to adapt themselves to these changed relationship Government employees will have to undergo a new process of training. This is a kind of brainwashing and time is required for re-adjustment and adaptation.

Whether genuine reforms or ‘showing who’s boss’, these measures affected the Public Service severely. In fact, a PAP leader wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew about “the deliberate hostility being stirred up in certain sections of the Party towards the English educated…. [causing] a growing sense of suffocation felt by teachers, lawyers, doctors and engineers”. Public officers might not complain publicly but those most aggrieved chose to leave altogether. Civil servant Goh Koh Pui remembered, there was “quite a big [number of] resignations from the Administrative Service.” His colleague, George Bogaars, recorded “the resignations of some half a dozen or more top civil servants who found their positions untenable.” A PAP politician added 300 others from the professional services. Bogaars later wrote:

The damage this did to the civil service was serious since it deprived the administration, at a time when it could least afford it, of very experienced officers who could, not only carry forward the administration but help in training and guidance of the large batches of new entrants who had to be fill up vacancies created by expatriate retirements and Malayanisation. These officers who had resigned had been recruited before the Second World War into the Straits Settlements Civil Service and had seen their service in many parts of the Malay Peninsula. Their withdrawal compounded the difficulties that were to face the civil service in the new chapter of political history that had begun.

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64 SAR 1962 77-78.
67 Goh Poh Kui, Oral interview transcript, p. 5.
68 Bogaars (1973) 78.
70 Bogaars (1973) 78.
The departure of unhappy senior public officers, nevertheless, removed the resistance within the bureaucracy to the PAP government. At the same time, these departures opened up the upper echelons to rising high-calibre young officers.\(^71\) Altogether, this change in Public Service’s leadership facilitated the PAP government’s efforts to align the Public Service. With the benefit of hindsight, Quah pointed to these measures as a concerted socialisation effort by the PAP government.\(^72\)

5.5 The PAP Split, Merger into Malaysia, and the Role of the Public Service

The political context was meanwhile evolving dramatically and the effects of the socialisation and reform of the bureaucracy would play their parts. In April 1961, Ong Eng Guan, having earlier been sacked from his ministerial and party posts for challenging the PAP leadership, resigned his Legislative Assembly seat at Hong Lim constituency to trigger a by-election. Despite its efforts, the PAP’s candidate was routed by Ong. More significantly, the PAP’s defeat alarmed the Malayan government to the risk of Singapore – under a weak PAP government – falling to the communists and threatening Malaya’s security.\(^73\)

In May 1961, Malayan Prime Minster Tunku Abdul Rahman, erstwhile cool about Singapore’s reunion with Malaya, reignited the possibility of merger. A Singapore under its jurisdiction would allow the Malayan government to arrest communists within the PAP, which Lee Kuan Yew and the English-educated leaders could not do without backlash from the Chinese masses. Lim Chin Siong and the pro-communists naturally resisted Singapore coming under the Malayan government.

As merger became a battle for survival between PAP leaders and pro-communists, Lim Chin Siong led supporters to defect en masse.\(^74\) The party organisation collapsed: 35 of the 51 branch committees and 19 of the 23 organising secretaries deserted the PAP to join Lim’s newly set-up Barisan Socialis.\(^75\)

As the PAP clung onto government with a four-vote margin, negotiations with the Federation government finally produced results. Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo


territories would merge to form Malaysia.\textsuperscript{76} The Barisan Socialis, with its survival at stake, demanded a referendum on merger. The PAP government agreed to a referendum, but rather than ‘for or against’ merger, over the specific terms of merger.\textsuperscript{77}

Against this background, the PAP government drew on the Public Service in its campaign for merger. As the incumbent government, the PAP saw as its right to mobilise all resources of the state, because merger – in its view – was a state-wide cause. Union with Malaya would allow Singapore to become independent, provide for economic growth, thereby generating revenue to fund programs to improve the population’s standards of living.

In its campaign, the PAP government highlighted its public service achievements to ingratiate itself with the population. On the government’s behalf, the Ministry of Culture published pamphlets drawing attention to the government’s accomplishments.\textsuperscript{78} Prominence was accorded to the 44,251 public housing units completed since self-government, housing 20% of the population, complete with utilities and amenities.\textsuperscript{79} Electricity supply was extended to 15 villages, improving living conditions of about 35,000 people.\textsuperscript{80} 21 primary schools and eight secondary schools were constructed, increasing school enrolments by 76,028 to 397,005.\textsuperscript{81} The Economic Development Board, these publications proclaimed, would “induce investments totalling something like $1,740 million and to create economic and social opportunities that would meet the needs of our vast growing population”.\textsuperscript{82}

Behind these statistics, cited to lend credence to the PAP government’s having improved the population’s standard of living, was the handiwork of public officers. While the PAP leaders drew up the broad political visions and agenda, public officers translated these into detailed plans, and then carried out and coordinated the implementation of programs to better the lives of the population. Hence, the work of the Public Service gave the PAP government the evidence of its public service for the citizens, and converted these into votes for the government at the referendum.

\textsuperscript{77} SAR 1962: 22.
\textsuperscript{79} SAR 1960: 256; Ministry of Culture, \textit{Year of fulfilment}, (no page nos.).
\textsuperscript{80} Ministry of Culture, \textit{Year of progress}.
\textsuperscript{81} SAR 1959: 208; SAR 1962:296: Ministry of Culture, \textit{Year of fulfilment}, (no page nos).
\textsuperscript{82} Ministry of Culture, \textit{Year of progress}.
Results of the September 1962 referendum was an overwhelming 71% support for PAP's Alternative 'A'.\textsuperscript{83} PAP's win halted the tide of its fall, from the by-election defeats to the mass defections to the destruction of its branch organisations. Its majority in the Legislative Assembly continued to be tenuous, with the razor-thin majority negated after more defections to Barisan Socialis. And it took the Anglo-Malayan-Singapore Internal Security Council’s 1963 arrest of Barisan leaders, for consorting with plotters of the Brunei revolt, to ease the pressure off the PAP. But the 1962 referendum, stemming PAP's plummet and ensuring Singapore merger with Malaysia, saved the PAP government from certain political collapse.

The Public Service, as evidenced in the preceding discussion, played a role in PAP’s success at the referendum. Permanent secretaries, directors and heads of ministries and state agencies helped translated the PAP’s political visions into specific policies, and then cascaded these into detailed actionable plans. Public officers across the rank-and-file, actualised these plans by building thousands of public housing units and implementing other essential public services. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew would later credit the construction of the first few blocks of public housing apartments in his Tanjong Pagar constituency for helping him hold on to his ward.\textsuperscript{84}

In this regard, the Political Study Centre, as part of the measures by the PAP government to rein in and reform the Public Service, delivered its objectives. Public officers professed a better understanding of the intentions of the PAP government, and a deeper appreciation of the political milieu in which government policies and programmes needed to be formulated and delivered. For those whom Goh Keng Swee labelled as ‘die-hards’ in his evaluation to the Legislative Assembly,\textsuperscript{85} the courses at the Political Study Centre probably sealed their decisions to leave the Public Service. The resignations of these senior officers removed the high level resistance within the bureaucracy towards the PAP government. And by facilitating the rise of younger officers who were more receptive towards the government, these departures consolidated the PAP government’s control over the bureaucracy and allowed the PAP government to have a cooperative agent to implement its policies and programmes.

\textsuperscript{83} SAR 1962: 24.
\textsuperscript{84} Yap, Lim and Leong (2009) 259.
\textsuperscript{85} SLAD, 12 Dec 1960, section 387.
5.6 The Staff Training Centre

The Political Study Centre’s success in socializing public officers was, however, at the expense of staff training. The Staff Training School set up by the colonial authorities continued after self-government to conduct induction and functional skills training (see Table 5.3). In late 1959, its name changed to the Staff Training Centre.\(^{86}\)

Table 5.3 Analysis of Training Courses at the Staff Training Centre, 1959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Course</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>No. held</th>
<th>Division Grades &amp; Number attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Others Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Administrative</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>3 44 - - -</td>
<td>- - 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Executive</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>1 - 13 - -</td>
<td>- - 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clerical</td>
<td>1½ months</td>
<td>4 - - 75 -</td>
<td>- - 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Clerical Assistant</td>
<td>4 days</td>
<td>1 - - 18 -</td>
<td>- - 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Administrative Course for Principals</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>1 - 30 - -</td>
<td>- - 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Courtesy Course</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>52 - 51 547 1009 -</td>
<td>- - 1607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Course for Legislative Assemblymen</td>
<td>10 mornings</td>
<td>2 - - - 24</td>
<td>- - 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>64 44 94 640 1009</td>
<td>24 1811</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the Political Study Centre was set up, the resources of the Staff Training Centre were gradually hollowed out to support the former. The Director of Training who headed the Staff Training Centre, namely George Thomson, was concurrently appointed head of the Political Study Centre and progressively spending more time at the latter (see Table 5.4).\(^{87}\) Although the Staff Training Centre was allocated three officers and the Political Study Centre one instructor, both Centres were sharing two officers by 1961.\(^{88}\) The Political Study and the Staff Training Centres were in all purposes one entity, the latter subsumed under the banner of the Political Study Centre.

While the Political Study Centre had its own building, complete with lecture hall, seminar rooms and canteen, the Staff Training Centre occupied half a level in the Fullerton Building which housed other departments. The Staff Training Centre’s sole lecture hall could be partitioned into two discussion rooms but “the partition is not sound proof, and it is not possible to hold two lectures simultaneously.”\(^{89}\) By 1963, the Staff Training Centre had lost most of the important training. Induction for the \textit{élite} Administrative Service and Executive Service were transferred to the Political Study.

\(^{86}\) [SAR 1959: 45; Lee Kuan Yew, “On Improving the Apparatus of the State: Speech at the End of the First Course for Assemblymen on the Work of Government Ministries and Departments at the Staff Training School (29 October 1959),” NAS, Papers of Lee Kuan Yew 134-136; Ministry of Culture, “Address by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, to Assemblymen and Civil Servants on the conclusion of the Second Course for Legislative Assemblymen at the Staff Training School on November 16, 1959,” NAS Document Iky19591116; ST 29 Oct 1959: 7, ST 15 Nov 1959: 5.]
Table 5.4: The Political Study Centre & Staff Training Centre, 1962

Director, Training
concurrently
Head, Political Study Centre

Political Study Centre
No. 4 Goodwood Hill

- Lecturer
  (part-time)

Staff Training Centre
Fullerton Building

- Staff Instructor
- Higher Executive Officer
  (Vacant)
- Executive Officer
  (Vacant)

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90 Drawn up from information in “Staff Training in Singapore Government Service,” 8 Jun 1962, File MC 218/62, NAS Microfilm No. AR 819/32.
Centre. Apart from induction for in Division 3, the majority of the courses held at the Staff Training Centre were for interpreters and translators (compare Table 5.5 with Table 5.3). The Staff Training Centre had effectively become a school for training the lower rank-and-file hierarchy of the bureaucracy.

Table 5.5 Training Courses conducted by Staff Training Centre, 1963

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Courses</th>
<th>Number of courses / sessions held</th>
<th>Number of Officers attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Induction</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction for Trainee Teachers, TTC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture to Police Inspectors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of Student Interpreters and Police Translators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Malay</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) English</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Chinese characters</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>1,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Hindustani</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Tamil</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi) Punjabi</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii) Malayalam</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from an analysis in Seah’s 1971 study, no formal evaluation of the Staff Training Centre can be found. Seah attributed the Staff Training Centre’s difficulties to resourcing, coordination among relevant agencies and attitudes towards training. To illustrate, Seah pointed to the Centre’s 1962 budget being only 4% of that of the Teachers’ Training College. Poor liaison among the Public Service Commission, Establishment Division and Staff Training Centre led to the Centre not receiving updated lists of recruits, resulting in laggard induction of new officers across the bureaucracy. With poor resources affecting capacity, the Centre’s courses were superficial, providing only basic knowledge rather than actual ‘real’ training; participants apparently preferred on-the-job training. The government was not unaware and a Commission of Inquiry recommended tighter coordination among the agencies to improve the training of civil servants. But the attitudes among senior civil servants towards training also contributed to the Staff Training Centre’s difficulties. 17 heads of departments, responding to a survey initiated by the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, indicated that only 6% of their staff, in their opinion, needed training. More importantly, most department-heads did not see the Staff Training Centre as useful, preferring staff to attend courses elsewhere.

91 SAR 1963: 449.
92 Seah (1971) 155.
94 Seah (1971) 156-158.
In contrast, the Political Study Centre did not suffer the limitations of its poorer sibling. With the high level of political attention accorded it, public officers nominated to attend courses at the Centre, even for lectures on Saturday evenings, duly turned up. Their enthusiasm was also due to the more interesting and relevant curriculum at the Political Study Centre.

Ngiam Tong Dow, in retrospect, explained that the political leadership was more interested in cultivating the Administrative Service than the Staff Training Centre. The Administrative Service was an *élite* scheme of service originating from the colonial bureaucracy. It was modeled after the British administrative class to provide the leadership corps for the bureaucracy. Ngiam, who joined the Administrative Service after self-government, pointed out that the Prime Minister and his Finance Minister in particular were focused on developing a small Administrative Service leadership cadre to lead and manage the broader public service:

The whole concept was that we must have a core of men. What Dr. Goh called the Praetorian Guards .... So we must develop a core of Praetorian Guards to safeguard the sovereignty of the country. And this whole idea of developing a civil service is to develop the Praetorian Guards. So I think Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee, they were not really interested, if I may say so, [in the] Staff Training Centre.  

5.7 Priority of Socialisation: State Formation through Merger and Independence

Hence, while the Political Study Centre was successful in re-orienting public officers, this broadening of the definition of training to include socialization was at the expense of skills and vocational training and the Staff Training Centre. With state-formation as the over-arching context, however, the importance accorded to socialization is understandable, even necessary.

5.7.1 Merger into the Federation of Malaysia

The organization of the Public Services was one of the key questions leading up to Singapore’s Merger into the Federation of Malaysia, and among “the inevitable disputes between the two Governments.”  

In the course of Merger discussions, Federal Deputy Premier Abdul Razak and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew agreed there were five areas which needed close examination by senior civil servants from both sides. Under the ambit of an “Inter-Governmental Committee on Merger of

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95 Ngiam Tong Dow, Interview with Author, 10 Jan 2013.

96 The Earl of Selkirk [UK High Commissioner to Singapore and UK Commissioner-General for South-East Asia], to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Inward Telegram Secret No. 559, 4 Dec 1962, TNA, CO 1030/1067.
Singapore with the Federation of Malaya” were sub-committees addressing issues pertaining to the constitution, fiscal policies, security, broadcasting, and an “Establishment and Organisation Sub-Committee”.⁹⁷

Eventually, the Merger with Malaysia saw Singapore transferring to the Central Government the administrative portfolios of “civil aviation, meteorological services, transport, telecommunications, post, judicial services, audit, immigration and passports, defence, police and prisons.”⁹⁸ Among these, the most significant was the Police Force along with the Special Branch responsible for internal security.⁹⁹ The Singapore State Government retained the Ministries of Culture, Education, Finance, Health, Home Affairs, Labour and Law and National Development (see Table 4.1). The change into a state-level Public Service, as part of a federal bureaucracy, appeared more nominal than substantial. Hence, apart from the security agencies, the Singapore Public Service post-Merger continued status quo ante.

Following Singapore’s accession into Malaysia, the Political Study Centre continued to feature prominently while the Staff Training Centre languished in its shadows. Immediately after Merger, “the scope of work of this [Political Study] centre was expanded to include the Federation of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak at the request of the governments of these territories.”¹⁰⁰ Within three months of Merger, the Political Study Centre conducted eight courses for the Sarawak Civil Service and Sabah government. These were recorded in the official annual, renamed Singapore Yearbook:

During each course, the political, economic and social problems of the region were discussed in the light of the new national pattern of responsibilities and the new attitude and methods of working required of a Civil Service in a community with full adult suffrage and a full parliamentary system of Government.¹⁰¹

Civil servants from the Federation government were sent to attend the courses organised in Singapore, which continued as before merger. In contrast, there were no mention of the Staff Training Centre in any public records between 1964 and 1966.¹⁰²

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⁹⁷ Copy of Letter from Permanent Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Federation of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur to the Prime Minister, Singapore, 26 Nov 1962, TNA, CO 1030/1067. Also Tun Haji Abdul Razak bin Dato Hussien [Deputy Prime Minister, Malaya], to Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister, Singapore, 17 Nov 1962, TNA, CO 1030/1067, and Lee Kuan Yew, to Tun Haji Abdul Razak bin Dato Hussien, Deputy Prime Minister, Federation of Malaya, 20 Nov 1962, TNA, CO 1030/1067.
⁹⁸ Yang di-Pertuan Negara’s Speech, SLAD, 29 Nov 1963, section 119.
¹⁰⁰ Seah (1971) 448.
¹⁰¹ SAR 1964: 448.
5.7.2 Full Independence for Singapore

On 9 Aug 1965, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew suddenly proclaimed the independence of Singapore. While Singapore's separation was unexpected, relations between the Federal government and the Singapore State government were already “far from happy.”¹⁰³ The deteriorating Malaysia-Singapore relations leading to the latter's separation is the subject of several dedicated books¹⁰⁴ and not the focus of this study. To briefly provide context for discussion, the conflict between the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which led the Barisan Nasional coalition government in Malaysia, and the People's Action Party in Singapore was fundamentally racial: PAP’s meritocratic approach to governance challenged UMNO’s affirmative action policies aimed at preserving Malay political dominance. Other issues expanded the contestation while rhetoric from both sides of the Causeway fanned hostilities. But bloody riots in 1964 underscored the racial undertones of the Malaysian-Singapore conflict, which complicated the search for an acceptable solution to abate the spiralling tension. Eventually, to avoid further acrimony and violence, key UMNO and PAP leaders agreed to separate Singapore from the Federation to its own independence.

The suddenness of Singapore’s independence surprised even its own Public Service; except for a handful of very senior officers, the rest of the bureaucracy was completely kept in the dark.¹⁰⁵ The bureaucracy scrambled to set up the functions of a sovereign state. Chan surmised that, “When Singapore separated from Malaysia, the island fortuitously was managed by a politicised and relatively skilled bureaucracy.”¹⁰⁶ The delicacy of the situation required a keen appreciation of the political context: while the Malaysian government formally separated Singapore from the Federation, some radical elements in Malaysia were threatening to abrogate Singapore’s independence.¹⁰⁷ A state of war remained with Indonesia in view of Jakarta’s Confrontation. Securing Singapore’s borders while rallying the international community to recognise and guarantee its sovereignty, and expanding trade to heighten its economic viability all became Singapore’s paramount priorities. George Bogaars, a senior civil servant at that time, wrote later:

¹⁰⁴ Two books focusing on Singapore’s Merger with and Separation from Malaysia are Albert Lau, A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement (Singapore: Times, 1998) and Tan Tai Yong, Creating ‘Greater Malaysia’: Decolonization and the Politics of Merger (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008).
¹⁰⁵ Only three civil servants knew of Singapore’s impending Separation: Stanley Stewart, Head of the Civil Service, Wong Chooi Sen, the Cabinet Secretary, and George Bogaars, Director of Special Branch. Lee Kuan Yew (1998) 631.
Up to then the main focus of attention of the civil service had been domestic and internal matters. The paramount concern had been on political stability and security and the development of social and economic services to sustain this stability. The civil service has been conditioned over the previous decade to think largely in terms of Singapore’s internal problems.108 Thus the rush to set up the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior and Defence and adjust functions of other ministries to meet the demands of a sovereign state (see Table 5.6). More challenging than structures was staffing new ministries and adjusted portfolios with the right people. The shortage of staff with the competencies and stature compelled the Civil Service to search the private sector for people to hold high-level appointments in the nascent Foreign Service.109 Even as officers were pulled away to staff newly-created portfolios, deputies and subordinates might not be qualified to take over vacated leadership positions. “Fortuitously,” as Chan put it, Singapore’s public officers had by this time “shared the same ideology as the ruling leadership and was sensitive to its political tasks.”110 An outcome she attributed to the “reorientation and retraining of the Civil Service” through the Political Study Centre.

Unsurprisingly, with the state at the threshold of state-formation following independence, political socialisation was given greater priority, much more than skills training. The retiring Head of the Civil Service highlighted the continued importance of political socialisation in the context of state-formation:

we must understand that the position of the Administrative Service in newly emerging and independent developing countries is different from that of Colonial and pre-self governing days. Whilst we still should not take part in politics, we cannot disregard politics in that there must be a keen sense of political awareness and a better standard of political assessment of conditions, problems and situations on our part, if we are going to advise our Ministers better in the formulation of policy, and understand and loyally carry out policies laid out by the Government.111

Indeed, records available suggested that the Political Study Centre continued to enjoy priority while the training of senior officers was not returned to the Staff Training Centre.112 Instead, the Staff Training Centre was equipping vocational skills to officers who were relatively junior in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Between 1967 and 1969, for example, it provided induction courses for clerks, language classes for interpreters, and training in financial procedures.113

108 Bogaars (1973) 81.
109 Chan (1991) 162; Bogaars (1973) 82.
110 Chan (1991) 162.
Table 5.6: Structure of the Singapore Government, circa 1965

President
(Head of State)

Prime Minister’s Ministry

Ministry of Culture
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Finance
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Deputy Prime Minister’s Ministry
Ministry of Interior & Defence
Ministry of Law
Ministry of Labour
Ministry of Social Welfare
Ministry of National Development

5.8 Closure of the Political Study Centre and Staff Training Centre

In August 1969, the government announced that the Political Study Centre was to be closed. After 10 years of operation, the Centre was deemed to have achieved its purpose remarkably: “All senior members of the Civil Service have undergone courses at the centre.” The government press statement announcing the closure added that newly recruited civil servants, having gone through National Service and been brought up in an environment of nation-building, would have a better appreciation of national objectives. Another possible reason might be the confidence of the PAP government in its political power, including its control over the bureaucracy. The strongest indicator of the PAP’s power was the overwhelming 84% popular vote through which the PAP was returned to power at the 1968 elections.

While the Staff Training Centre remained in operation, it continued to provide only vocational training to rank-and-file public officers. Induction courses for the élite Administrative Service and other Division 1 officers were not returned to the Staff Training Centre even with the closure of the Political Study Centre. After 1969, the official Singapore Year Book, which had devoted sections of varying lengths to key developments at the Staff Training Centre since its 1954 inception, no longer mention the Centre.

With the closure of the Political Study Centre, a gap in the training of senior officers thus arose. Given that these public officers occupied key positions in the bureaucracy, this training gap is a significant and glaring one.

5.9 Summing Up – Reforming the Bureaucracy

This chapter has described the use of the Political Study Centre as a point to change the attitudes of the bureaucracy. Through the device of the conceptual framework, the chapter examined the subject from the lenses of the bureaucracy and the state, i.e., the political leadership at that time and the social-economic make-up of the jurisdiction. In 1959, the Singapore Public Service re-inaugurated from the colonial bureaucracy was

115 Among the Political Study Centre’s 3 senior officers, Thomson was posted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Director Lee Ting Hui to Ministry of Education and Staff Tutor Gerald de Cruz to Ministry of Culture. ST 3 Aug 1969: 13.
118 SAR 1971ff. From 1971, the SAR series changed its format to report on developments in the year preceding the title. Hence, SAR 1971 recorded events in 1970.
apprehensive towards its new political masters: the People’s Action Party had since its formation accentuated its nationalistic credentials by pitting itself against the colonial establishment. The PAP leaders on their part were exasperated that the bureaucracy, after 140 years as agents of the colonial authorities, was insensitive to the emerging political context: the Chinese-educated majority of the population, who now held electoral sway, was so aggrieved by colonial rule that they could be easily fanned into voting in a communist regime. While senior civil servants were largely disconnected with the public they were supposed to serve, street-level bureaucrats indulged in corruption, and the bureaucracy – still steeped in colonial-era organizational culture – was seen as ineffectual by the local population.

Consequently, the PAP government set up the Political Study Centre to reform the bureaucracy itself. By socializing senior civil servants to a deeper appreciation of the political context against which policies would be made, the Political Study Centre was not simply introducing change into the bureaucracy. Rather, in re-orienting these officers away from the colonial-era organizational culture towards an alignment with the newly-elected PAP government, the Political Study Centre cultivated a loyalty towards the emerging state among them. As they returned to their leadership positions of various ministries and departments, these senior civil servants carried with them that new alignment with the new government across the Public Service. Through socializing the bureaucratic élite, the Political Study Centre in effect was spreading reforms across the bureaucracy. The Political Study Centre was thus a catalytic point of change in the Singapore Public Service.

In seeking to break the bureaucracy away from its colonial-era traditions, the Political Study Centre was not modelled after any British institution. In fact, the prevailing attitude in the UK Home Civil Service continued to be learning on-the-job, “sitting by Nellie”. 119 Several more years would to pass before the Centre for Administrative Studies was set up in 1963 as Britain’s first dedicated civil service training institution. 120

The Political Study Centre’s socialisation aim draws comparison with training institutions in communist states. As Lee Kuan Yew and his fellow English-educated ministers were at that time co-habiting with pro-communists cadres within the People’s


This use of training for socialization, though, was at the expense of skills and vocational training. Lee Boon Hiok surmised that the PAP “believed that the new recruit to the Civil Service would require only a brief and therefore not a very thorough course to familiarize himself with the workings of the Civil Service. The civil servant would thus, for the rest of his career, have to gain expertise while ‘on-the-job’.”\footnote{Lee Boon Hiok (1980) 450.} Resources from the Staff Training Centre were thus diverted for political socialization. The Staff Training Centre, in contrast to its role in training senior officers before 1959, became relegated to training the rank-and-file of the bureaucracy.

Through the lens of state-formation theory, such emphasis on political socialization represented the efforts of the emerging political \textit{élite} to ‘penetrate’ its authority across the new state. The bureaucracy, in particular, having served colonial authorities for an extended period, was in all purposes a colonial institution. Together with other measures \textit{vis-à-vis} the bureaucracy, the Political Study Centre was meant to show ‘who’s the boss’. Asserting executive control over the bureaucracy would allow the new political \textit{élite} – in particular Lee Kuan Yew and his inner core of English-educated ministers – to harness the Public Service as its agents of policy implementation. At the same time, these measures brought public officers closer to the citizenry, which served to forge a common identity among the people of Singapore, an aspect of ‘standardisation’ in state-formation theory. The role of the Public Service in state-formation, and the effects of socialization at the Political Study Centre, became all the more evident when the PAP experienced its worst crisis in 1961.

The success of the Political Study Centre’s socialization was best demonstrated when public officers stuck with the PAP government in 1961. Following the Hong Lim electoral debacle and the massive defection of pro-communist elements within its ranks, the PAP was hanging on by a wafer-thin legislative majority. At this point when the PAP leadership was at its most weakened, had public officers remained disgruntled, they could have taken the opportunity to not comply with instructions from their political masters.
A logical explanation would be public officers’ adherence to constitutional requirements, conditioned by British tradition, to abide by political masters regardless of their attitudes towards the government. Another explanation could be public officers’ fears of Singapore – and the bureaucracy – falling under the control of pro-communists. If the PAP had appeared harsh, an even more leftist pro-communist regime could escalate to outright persecution of public officers. Indeed, George Bogaars reflected years later, when he went on to become the Head of the Civil Service, that Singapore’s civil servants at that point of decolonisation could have it worse:

It would have been one of the easiest things for the Government to have gone along with the general mood and fashion of the day – a mood and fashion which had started in the newly independent countries of Asia after the Second World War – to denigrate and abuse the civil service until by gradual exhaustion it loses all confidence in itself as well as the respect of the public for which it is paid to serve. The results of such attrition are a collapse of the Administration and its floundering in inefficiency, corruption and graft. These were already apparent in certain parts of Asia, though the cause was attributed to everything else except the political pandering to popular sentiment to get even with civil servants and the bureaucracy who apparently represented the past colonial masters. 123

The most compelling explanation for the bureaucracy’s support for the PAP government at its most vulnerable was the successful socialisation of public officers to align with the PAP. Indeed, despite the initial apprehension towards the PAP and the weakened state of the ruling party, public officers continued to extend their support the political masters. Much of the policies that helped the PAP win electoral votes, such as public housing, better municipal amenities, larger student enrolment and other socio-economic improvements, were translated from the political visions of the PAP into actual realities by public officers. Given that popular support for the PAP at the Merger Referendum saved the PAP from collapse, public officers through their policies played a not uncritical role. The socialisation of the Public Service through the Political Study Centre was thus largely successful. To quote a civil servant at that time:

I think the whole thing went through in a very satisfactory way in a sense because it corrected the situation within so short a period. If you look at it in retrospect, it was a correction of an image of the Civil Service with a very short time. And after that, the PAP could use the civil servants. 124

Bogaars, taking a long view of the evolution of the bureaucracy years later as head of the civil service, was sure that socialisation of civil servants through the Political Study Centre

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123 Bogaars (1973) 78-79.
124 Goh Sin Tub, Oral interview transcript 45.
played an instrumental role in aligning the bureaucracy, leading the civil service to support the Government when it was at its weakest and under attack:

The politicisation of the civil service ... by the Political Study Centre ... [was], by and large, successful. There was a gradual understanding and perception of the civil service of political matters and the issues which concerned the electorate and influenced Government policy. This was tested during the next half decade when the extreme left in the People’s Action Party under Communist control broke away from the party in a bid to seize political power for themselves. ... The civil service had to be mobilised across the full range of its functions and activities to meet the attack at all points.\textsuperscript{125}

Political scientist, Chan Heng Chee, went so far as to suggest that the PAP leadership, in view of the internal party struggle, “forged an alliance with the civil servants through re-socialisation and politicisation of the Civil Service” through the Political Study Centre.\textsuperscript{126} Although the timeline of events did not fit her argument, the Political Study Centre was set up in 1959 earlier than the rise of intra-PAP fissures in 1960, Chan was perceptive in pointing out that PAP leadership essentially formed an alliance with the bureaucracy. And the Political Study Centre was a critical element in that alliance. In fact, so profound was the Centre’s impact of the ruling party that when the PAP suffered electoral slippage 30 years later, PAP leaders invoked references to the Political Study Centre to remind civil servants of the importance of political sensitivity in policy-making.\textsuperscript{127}

In retrospect, therefore, through various socialisation efforts, the PAP government aligned the Public Service to share its goal of independence through peaceful and constitutional merger with Malaya. With the bureaucracy thus persuaded, the PAP government could rely on public officers supporting its merger campaign even when the party was weakened by internal strife. A Public Service that was aligned to PAP government could be counted upon to pursue the interests of Singapore, as it became a state of Malaysia with the success of merger.

The inception point of change, however, began with the Political Study Centre.

\textsuperscript{125} Bogaars (1973) 80.
\textsuperscript{126} Chan Heng Chee, “The PAP and the Structuring of the Political System,” Management of Success, eds. Sandhu and Wheatley 5.
CHAPTER 6

In 1971, the Staff Training Institute (STI) was established to build up the capacity of the Singapore Public Service to keep pace with the needs of the emerging developmental state. As Singapore embarked upon rapid state-led economic development after independence, with the key aim of ensuring the survival of the new nation-state, the bureaucracy was expected to play the role of an ‘economic general staff’. Yet, without the requisite management training, this was a role civil servants were not prepared for. Attracting and retaining qualified and talented officers to lead and manage this developmental state was further complicated by more attractive career prospects in the private sector, booming from the state-led development.

The STI was a response to level up the management skills of public officers to help drive and oversee state-led development. This equipping of managerial skill-sets was particularly critical with the appearance of a gap in executive training following the closure of the Political Study Centre and end of centralized training of the élite Administrative Service and Division 1 officers. At the same time, the introduction of management training at the STI would boost the career development of public officers and help sweeten the attractiveness of the Public Service in recruiting and retaining qualified and talented personnel.

The chapter, in then detailing the organizational structure and personnel staffing of the STI, accounts for the considerations motivating these developments and draws out the STI’s relationships with its supervising agency as well as the broader bureaucracy. The manner in which the STI structured and deployed its resources also illustrates how the Institute sought to carry out its mission and objectives through its training activities.

Given its new brief, an evaluation of the achievements of the STI – while difficult – is appropriate before concluding this chapter. A fair assessment is challenging because of poor access to official government reviews of the STI. In any case, a noticeable diminishing of formal records in the public domain after independence, and increasing brevity of these records, means that interviews with officials have to be relied upon to inform on the writing of this, and subsequent, chapters. To sharpen the evaluation of the STI, some comparisons with appropriate foreign training initiatives seeks to locate the STI’s relative development. Finally, the chapter concludes by examining the events leading to the succession of the STI by another new training school, the Civil Service Staff Development Institute.
6.1 The Changing Context

On 15 March 1971, the Minister for Finance, Hon Sui Sen, opened the Staff Training Institute.¹ This was less than two years after the closure of the Political Study Centre, which – as mentioned in the preceding chapter – had taken over the training of the élite Administrative Service and other senior public officers. With the closure of the Political Study Centre, a gap in the training of senior bureaucrats thus arose. The Staff Training Centre, which provided vocational training for the lower hierarchy of the public service, also diminished further in importance that it disappeared from official records.

Although no publicly available records can account for the training of public officers between 1969 and 1971, training did continue. Herman Hochstadt, the Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Finance whose portfolio covered personnel and training matters, explained that the management training for officers in the Administrative and Executive Services was largely on-the-job during this period. However, this was supplemented, when perceived to be needed and feasible, by ad hoc participation on sponsorship from individual ministries and departments with support of MOF, which had central control over finance and personnel, at part-time programmes and courses by various organizations such [as] SAMTAS and later SIM.²

Hochstadt was referring to the Supervisory and Management Training Association of Singapore, a professional body, and the Singapore Institute of Management, an educational institution. Both were entities outside of the government and public service.

Hence, the training of senior public officers between 1969 and 1971 was essentially outsourced. This out-placing of senior officers’ training was not driven by innovative thinking in public administration or human resource management. Rather, it was an abandonment of formal structured training, returning to pre-1954 colonial practice of ad-hoc on-the-job coaching by more experienced officers. By 1971, even within the top Administrative Service, for instance, 86 of the total 176 officers had not undergone any induction training. By the government’s own admission, “more than 50 per cent of the officers are relatively new and untrained”.³ As the People’s Action Party obviously recognized the value of training, having harnessed training to socialize civil servants upon forming government, a deliberate policy to marginalize training was unlikely. Perhaps the lowering of training as a priority resulted from the flurry of activities with the sudden thrust of independence upon the country. Senior officers, even when the importance of their training was recognized, were probably preoccupied

¹ ST 16 Mar 1971: 17.
³ Hon Sui Sen, Minister for Finance, quoted in ST 16 Mar 1971: 17.
with the urgent tasks at hand and could ill afford time for training. The need to finance new priorities of nation-building, as mentioned in the previous chapter, added pressure on the limited budget. In the face of such urgent tasks and competing pulls on resources, an unconscious diversion of the Public Service's attention away from training – rather than a deliberate neglect – was understandable if not inevitable.

6.1.1 Matching Pace with the Developmental State

The setting up of the Staff Training Institute pointed to the government's dissatisfaction with such unstructured arrangements. The Minister for Finance:

At present on-the-job training is provided on an *ad-hoc* basis, if at all, within prevailing constraints and resources in the ministries and departments. This is obviously unsatisfactory and a conscious effort will have to be made to provide adequate on-the-job training to supplement on-course training.  

Minister Hon Sui Sen elaborated that “the need was recognized for developing a core of well trained and efficient civil servants with imaginative concepts of management, if we are to maintain and even surpass the level of economic and social growth that Singapore has achieved over the last 10 years.” Implicit therein was the recognition that public officers were unable to match the pace of Singapore's development or changing domestic needs. Indeed, Quah commented that,

While Singapore's bureaucracy was not deficient in skilled manpower required for developmental programmes – the problem was not one of quantity as the size of the bureaucracy was quite large for a small country – the problem involved upgrading the quality of bureaucrats.

Early localization of the bureaucracy before independence and careful forecasting of manpower needs thereafter meant that Singapore had not suffered a scarcity of trained personnel. But the unconscious neglect of training, whether caused by post-independence preoccupations or budgetary constraints, exposed a need “to produce well trained and efficient civil servants equipped with knowledge of modern management”.

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Part of the reason public officers could not keep pace was Singapore’s remarkable speed of development. Chalmers Johnson, in explaining the East Asian economic miracles, included Singapore among the capitalist developmental states. That is, the government “hegemonic in a commanding height … mobilize[s] economic and political resources” to actively drive the economy. The policy instruments ‘guiding the market’ were “formulated by an élite economic bureaucracy, led by a pilot agency of ‘economic general staff’.” Developmental states, thus, relied on “a highly elaborate, resourceful, and centralized administrative apparatus for effectively implementing national planning priorities and administering direct and indirect control over the industrialization process.”

The genesis of Singapore’s developmental state was traced to 1959, when the PAP upon winning self-government embarked upon state-led industrialization. Economic development would also soak up unemployment and fund social expenditure to uplift the well-being of citizens. Post-independence, the PAP government’s focus to survive as a separate state led to rapid economic development. The structure of government, besides the security and social ministries, was geared entirely towards economic development and infrastructural expansion in support of that economic development (see Table 6.1). GDP grew from an already respectable 8.9% in 1965 to 15.2% in 1968. These figures were all the more impressive when set against the uncertainties post-Separation, especially when Britain announced its early withdrawal. With the UK bases accounting for 20% of Singapore’s economy and 25,000 local jobs, British withdrawal was threatening to halt Singapore’s economic engine. Despite such gloomy outlooks, the Singapore economy powered on to score 17.5% in 1971.

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Table 6.1: Structure of the Republic of Singapore Government, 1968

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **security ministries**
  - Ministry of Interior & Defence
  - Ministry of Foreign Affairs
  - Ministry of Law

- **economic development & infrastructure ministries**
  - Ministry of Communications
  - Ministry of Finance
  - Ministry of Labour
  - Ministry of National Development
  - Ministry of Science & Technology

- **social ministries**
  - Ministry of Culture
  - Ministry of Education
  - Ministry of Health
  - Ministry of Social Affairs

\[14\] Drawn up from information in *SAR 1968* 6-7; Hochstadt, email correspondence with Author, 3 Jan 2013.
The massive scale of development across Singapore exacerbated the government’s need for the requisite capacity to manage the developmental state. More importantly, the use of public enterprises to lead Singapore’s development strategy sharpened the need for managerial skills among public officers. Chan pointed out that Singapore had established statutory authorities to address particular development issues, such as the Housing and Development Board to construct public housing, the Development Bank of Singapore to finance industrial start-ups, etc. This “choice of the statutory authority as an organizational form released bureaucrats from the conventional rules and regulations of the Civil Service to permit flexibility and experimentation in new areas, with the minimum of control from the legislature.” But this “economic and administrative innovation” also compelled public officers to quickly acquire the managerial skills to preside over large state-led enterprises. George Bogaars, an Eurasian who was then Head of Civil Service, wrote that:

the rapid economic and social developments of the past few years had considerably expanded the scope of activities and responsibilities of Government and accelerated the pace of administration. The Government had become increasingly involved in businesses and industrial enterprises. All this had created a demand for properly trained civil servants with experience and knowledge of modern management techniques and with imaginative concepts of management.

The proliferation of multi-national-corporations into the economy, brought public officers face-to-face with some of the top executives from around the world, many of whom were highly qualified. For Singapore’s bureaucrats to be effective planners, regulators and policy-makers, dealing with overseas MNCs and local companies while keeping an eye on the country’s overall development, the need for Singapore’s public officers to be equipped with management training became real and urgent.

Hence, the STI was set primarily to provide the bureaucracy, particularly top public officers, with the requisite management training to match the country’s pace of development. The STI’s establishment in effect was a catch-up initiative to lift agency performance it was an acknowledgement and rectification of the inadequacy of on-the-job training. The STI was also meant to bring the training functions back in-house within the Public Service.

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15 Chan Heng Chee (1991) 164.
16 Bogaars (1973) 83.
6.1.2 Retaining Talents

At the same time, the STI also aimed to strengthen the Public Service’s human resource management amidst the changing economic context. The booming economy and influx of MNCs in the 1970s resulted in a keen competition for qualified manpower and, in particular, “Managerial skills were at a premium”.18

But the Public Service was losing its lustre as a career choice, due to poorer remuneration but training compared to the private sector. All officers in the Singapore Public Service were organized into four divisions. Division 1 consisted of staff in administrative and professional grades with honours-class university-degrees.19 Division 2 included executive and supervisory grades with general degrees or pre-university education. Division 3 contained technical and clerical grades with secondary school education, and Division 4 were officers carrying out manual duties.

Graduates with university-degrees typically began their careers as Executive Officers (EOs), a scheme of service in Division 2 (see Table 6.2). EOs could be promoted to Higher Executive Officer (HEO) grade and Senior Executive Officer (SEO), a Division 1 grade. Graduates with Honours-class degrees could jump-start their careers as SEOs in Division 1.

Table 6.2 Grade Structure of University-Graduates in the Public Service, 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division 1</th>
<th>Executive Service</th>
<th>Administrative Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent Secretary (PS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deputy Secretary (DS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principal Assistant Secretary (PAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant Secretary (AS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior Executive Officer (SEO)</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant (AA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division 2</td>
<td>Higher Executive Officer (HEO)</td>
<td>Executive Officer (EO)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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20 This EO scheme also admitted applicants with Higher School Certificate (equivalent to the UK-based General Certificate of Education Advanced Level) or polytechnic-diplomas but with lower salary points than university graduates. No single document among currently available records captures the Public Service’s grade structures. This section is drawn up from Singapore, Directory (Singapore: GPO, 1970) 18-25 updated 31 Oct 1971; Singapore, Establishment List for the Financial Year 1st April 1974 to 31st March 1975 (Estab List) (Singapore: GPO, 1974) 185-202; John Ewing-Chow, Management Training Officer, STI, circa 1974, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011; Teo Hee Lian, Language Education Officer, CSSDI, circa 1976, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012 & email correspondence with Author, 2 Jan 2013; Hochstadt, email correspondence with Author, 2 Jan 2013.
The SEO-grade was equivalent to the Administrative Assistant (AA), the entry-point of the elite Administrative Service.\(^{21}\) Originating from the colonial bureaucracy and modeled after the British administrative class, the Administrative Service was the leadership corps of the bureaucracy; its role was secondary only to that of the political leadership.\(^{22}\) No wonder that the Administrative Service was cultivated by the People’s Action Party as its ‘Praetorian Guards’ after it assumed power at self-government.\(^{23}\) Administrative Service officers (AO) could be promoted from EO-grades but many AAs entered as ‘returned scholars’. These referred to graduates, some from local universities but many more from prestigious overseas institutions, where they studied on government scholarships. Scholarships were awarded to students who excelled at their pre-university examinations, to identify and nurture talented personnel early. Upon completion of their studies, ‘scholars’ would serve in the Public Service for a number of years. Progression rungs up the AO career ladder, after the AA-grade, were Assistant Secretary (AS), Principal Assistant Secretary (PAS), Secretary, Deputy Secretary (DS) and finally Permanent Secretary (PS), the highest appointment in the Public Service.

The impact of private sector competition for manpower was best illustrated by a newspaper report at that time. *The Straits Times*’ survey of 50 senior officers found 32, all graduates with Honours-class degrees, would leave for better pay; only 13 would serve long term in the bureaucracy. The newspaper pointed out that, “The gap between wages in Government and the private sector has steadily widened during the past five or six years.”\(^{24}\) Fresh graduates with Honours-class degrees could start their careers earning $250 more per month in the private sector; Superscale-A officers could earn more than their $3,000 monthly salary in the private sector. This lure of monetary incentives, surmised political scientist Seah Chee Meow in an analysis around the same time, was due to a weak sense of identification with the Public Service:

> the bureaucratic ethos (such as pride in serving in the bureaucracy) is not effectively instilled among the bureaucrats who tend to be more susceptible to purely monetary considerations… due to the fact that many of the bureaucrats (especially those in the senior or division one grade) have not been in the bureaucracy for a long time. They have yet to internalise many of the norms of the bureaucracy.\(^{25}\)

\(^{21}\) By the late1970s, the grade structure adjusted slightly with the introduction of a Senior Administrative Assistant (SAA) and removal of the Secretary grades. Lee Boon Hiok (1980) 447, 462 and 478.
\(^{23}\) Ngiam, Interview with Author, 10 Jan 2013.
Remuneration for civil servants, particularly senior officers, would be raised progressively to match the pay-scales in the private sector. But this would materialise over several years rather than immediately.

In the meantime, the government was ready to improve the career development of public officers. Closer supervision was introduced to tighten on-the-job training, erstwhile *ad hoc* and unstructured. A senior officer, with the rank of Deputy Secretary, was appointed at the Ministry of Finance to oversee the enhanced scheme, and empowered to interview new officers regularly to track their progress through improved on-the-job training. At the same time, the career advancement of officers was to be more purposefully charted out through a programme of planned postings. The abilities, potential and even inclinations of officers were to be factored into considerations for the postings of officers. Minister Hon Sui Sen reiterated that “Postings of young officers will be made with the career development of the officers in mind and not merely because the postings are administratively convenient or expedient.”

The centerpiece of the government’s plan to attract and retain qualified and talented manpower amidst competition from the private sector was the Staff Training Institute. Undoubtedly, the STI in the first instance was to provide formal training to make up for the unconscious neglect of training in the years after independence. Specifically, STI’s primary role was to equip senior public officers, particularly the pinnacle Administrative Service officers, with the requisite management skill-sets to manage the emerging Singapore developmental state. While so ramping up the capacity of the public service, the training of the individual officer would grow his capacity to better perform his next job, thus preparing him for advancement in his career. Training in the STI was thus also aimed to attract and retain talented officers amidst the competition for manpower from the private sector.

6.2 The Staff Training Institute

Planning for the Staff Training Institute benefitted from the advice of two British management consultants. No indication, however, suggested any reference to the Fulton Report in Britain, recommending the setting up of a Civil Service College in the Home Civil Service, or the *Ecole Nationale d’Administration*. By all accounts, there were no attempts to model the STI on any civil service schools in other jurisdictions. To
site the STI, the former residence of a colonial official at Lorong Langsir, off Stevens Road, was identified and renovated into an instructional facility by March 1971.  

6.2.1 Organisational Structure

The Staff Training Institute was set up within the Treasury Division in the Ministry of Finance (see Table 6.3). The Permanent Secretary (Treasury) was assisted by three Deputy Secretaries. Herman Hochstadt, during this period, was the Deputy Secretary who – as part of his broader portfolio – oversaw the STI through the Personnel Administration Branch (PAB) (see Table 6.4). Locating the STI under the bureaucracy’s central personnel agency indicated that training was seen as a human resource subject. Heading the PAB was a Secretary-grade officer, Miss Lim Hsiu Mei.

Table 6.4: Staff Training Institute, on its establishment in 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>Herman Hochstadt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary, Personnel Administration Branch, Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>Miss Lim Hsiu Mei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting Head, STI</td>
<td>John Tan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officer (Administration)</td>
<td>Toh Boon Gin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Executive Officer (Training)</td>
<td>Larry Lim Yam Hun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Library Officer</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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28 Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.
30 STI, Report of Activities, July – December 1972; Directory 1970 25 updated 31 Oct 1971. John Tan would have been able detail the developments in this early period of STI but he could not be located.
Table 6.3: The Staff Training Institute in the Ministry of Finance, 1971

Ministry of Finance

Treasury Division

Personnel Administration Branch
Financial & General Administration Branch
Budget Branch
Accountant-General
Organisation & Methods Branch
Customs & Excise
Inland Revenue
Central Supplies Office

Economic Development Division

Staff Training Institute

31 Drawn up from information in Directory 1970 18-25 updated 31 Oct 1971 and 31 Jul 1972. Organisational units arranged left to right according to the sequence they were presented in the original documents.
In 1973, Miss Evelyn Chew Beng Eng, Principal Assistant Secretary in the Finance Ministry’s Personnel Administration Branch, was posted to the STI as Acting Director (see Table 6.5). Chew would be familiar with the STI, having been assisting Lim Hsiu Mei at the PAB, making her lateral transfer optimal. The Language Training and Management Training sections undertook the STI’s training functions, supported by the Administration Section.

In October 1973, a high-level Steering Committee on Training was set up to ‘advise’ the Director STI. However, one senior member of this Committee remembered that, “the Committee did not meet very often.” This Committee might not have much impact on the STI after all.

6.2.2 Personnel Staffing

Personnel for the STI were drawn from within the Public Service. The STI did not have to contemplate whether instructors should be recruited from among academics or civil servants, a question debated over when staffing Britain’s Centre of Administrative Studies and subsequently the UK Civil Service College. The STI, by 1974, had a total of about 45 staff, 12 of whom were engaged in direct training duties.

The post of Director of STI was a civil servant, exercising the bureaucracy’s authority over the Institute and linking the STI with the larger bureaucracy. The decision could also stem from administrative convenience by deploying a senior officer from the Finance Ministry who had the competency and was available to start the new school. Recruiting from outside the Public Service would have required time, apart from the new entrant’s unfamiliarity with the workings of the bureaucracy.

Similarly, the teaching staff was drawn from among civil servants with the number kept small. The Finance Minister explained that, “in view of the very wide field that we are going to cover, it will not be possible for us to have full-time staff lecturers

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33 Beside Head of Civil Service, Bogaars, members were Tan Chok Kian, Permanent Secretary (Finance)(Budget); Ngiam Tong Dow, Permanent Secretary (Finance)(Development); Peter Tan, Secretary, Public Service Commission; Miss Lim Hsiu Mei, Deputy Secretary (Personnel Administration). STI, MOF, Training Programme 1975, Jan 1975 1.2.
34 Ngiam Tong Dow, Interview with Author, 10 Jan 2013. Tan Chok Kian, Lim Hsiu Mei and Evelyn Chew also could not recall much about this Committee. Lim Hsiu Mei, email correspondence with Author, 17 Jan 2013; Evelyn Chew, Director, STI, 1973 – 1975, email correspondence with Author, 12 Apr 2013.
Table 6.5: Internal Structure of the Staff Training Institute, circa 1974

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Evelyn Chew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Language Branch**
  - Robert Walker Lynn (Head)
  - Assistant Head (Language)
  - 4 Language Education Officers (Group II)
  - 2 Language Education Officers (Group III)

- **Management Training**
  - Dr. Tan Thiam Soon (Head)
  - 3 Senior Training Officers (Management Training)

- **Administration**
  - John Tan (Head)
  - 2 Executive Officers
  - 2 Lang. Laboratory Technicians
  - 9 Clerical Officers & Assistants
  - 4 Typists
  - 1 Telephone Operator
  - 2 Driver & Despatch Rider
  - 3 Caretaker & Watchmen
  - 6 Servants & Attendants

- **Library**
  - Miss Chan Chwee Yin (Higher Library Officer)
  - Library Attendant

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in all the various courses that we want.” From the perspective of the Finance Ministry, maintaining a small staff of instructors could also keep expenditure low. But the small instructional cadre would not affect classes as the Institute planned on calling upon senior civil servants and officers from statutory boards to lead lectures for intermediate, advanced and induction courses.

Even so, the gap in management training expertise within the bureaucracy compelled the STI to look elsewhere for the relevant staff. As late as 1973, management trainers were still not recruited. Only in 1974 were six Management Training Officers appointed in STI. A Management Training Officer recruited around that time pointed out that “the economy was taking off and lots of people were joining the MNCs – National Semi-Conductor, Texas Instruments, hundreds of companies were coming in. There was shortage of manpower.”

Eventually, a University of Singapore academic was seconded to STI as Head, Management Training. Tan Thiam Soon quickly realised that the existing civil servant-trainers were not equipped to teach management courses beyond the induction and supervisory courses. As a result, Tan had to bring in colleagues from the university to lecture in STI’s management courses. The Head of Language Training, Robert Walker Lynn credited as “instrumental in developing the Language section of the Institute” was also from outside the civil service.

Finding the appropriate instructional staff with management expertise continued to be challenging against the background of a booming private sector: “For [Financial Year 1974], $143,370 was not spent because suitable staff including Training and Senior Training Officers and Language Education Officers were not recruited despite several attempts to do so through circulars and advertisements.”

The issue of locating instructors with the appropriate expertise was not caused by want of money. Remarkably, while much preparation had gone into planning the STI, such as identifying and renovating facilities, little advanced planning had focused on

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38 Hon Sui Sen, Minister for Finance, Parliamentary Debates, 24 Mar 1971, column 1172.
39 Public officers conducting lectures at the STI were paid allowances at the rate of $25 an hour for intermediate and advanced courses, and $4 to $10 for language courses. STI staff were not paid. Ibid.
41 Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.
42 Tan Thiam Soon, Interview with Author, 21 Nov 2012.
43 These included Dr. Gan Huat Tatt and Kek Soon Eng from the University of Singapore, and Lawrence Wong from the Singapore Institute of Management. Tan Thiam Soon, Interview with Author, 21 Nov 2012.
44 Chew, email correspondence with Author, 13 Apr 2013. Also Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011; Teo Hee Lian, STI, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012.
staffing it with the appropriate instructors. Tan Thiam Soon recalled that while his secondment from the University of Singapore was for a one-year term, there was no succession plan of STI’s management training officers to take over his position. Eventually, when Tan returned to the university, the position of Head of Management Training was left vacant for some time.

6.2.3 Resources and Support

As a sub-unit of the Finance Ministry, STI drew from the MOF’s budget to run its activities; participants and their parent-ministries did not have to pay any fees for the courses they attended. A good working relationship with MOF headquarters facilitated the resourcing of the Institute, but STI still faced logistical difficulties. Despite customized renovations, John Tan (who had supervised these upgrading works) wrote two years after STI’s opening that, “The existing premises have proved inadequate as more courses are mounted.” Inadequate equipment also prompted an obviously informed Member of Parliament to notice, during debates on the STI’s 1971 budget, the absence of “votes for audio-visual equipment.” To which, the Finance Minister replied: “It is always possible, of course, to get it on loan from the various organizations.”

6.2.4 Organisational Objectives and Training Activities

Although established in 1971, STI’s objectives were only publicly articulated several years later. The STI’s Training Programme 1975, its inaugural course prospectus, stated that:

The objective of the Staff Training Institute is to enhance the efficiency of the public sector by providing in-service training courses in the following areas:

- Induction
- Management & Supervision
- Specialised & Vocational
- Language.

These courses aimed at “Making officers aware of modern management concepts and tools” and “Showing officers how these concepts and tools can be applied in the Public Service.” In addition, they were meant to equip officers with “basic administrative skills.”

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46 Tan Thiam Soon, Interview with Author, 21 Nov 2012.
47 Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.
49 J. Conceicao, Member of Parliament for Katong, Parliamentary Debates, 24 Mar 1971, column 1171.
50 Hon Sui Sen, Minister for Finance, Parliamentary Debates, 24 Mar 1971, column 1172.
51 STI, Training Programme 1975, Jan 1975 1.1.
In the first nine months of its operations in 1971, the STI had organized an impressive 64 courses, training a total of 1,689 participants (see Table 6.6). Closer scrutiny revealed that some of these courses were conducted on behalf of STI by external institutions. All 15 Leadership Training courses were undertaken by the Outward Bound School and National Youth Leadership Training Institute. After paring away courses by external agencies, the STI really conducted 41 courses involving 1,124 participants.

**Table 6.6: Courses conducted by Staff Training Institute, 1971**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>No. Held</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Induction Courses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Officers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Executive Officers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence Executive Officers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management Courses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Administrative Officers Course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officers Course (Intermediate)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialised &amp; Vocational Courses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Services Training Course</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster Reading</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of Confidential Reports</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy &amp; Telephone</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Training</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward Bound School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Leadership Training Institute</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Training</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Education Board</td>
<td>1/2/3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1,689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a full year of operation, the STI had built up its capacity to provide a wider range of programmes (see Table 6.7). Personnel with the requisite knowledge and competency were brought on board, such as the secondment of Tan Thiam Soon from the University of Singapore to start up the Management Training Section or the recruitment of Robert W. Lynn to head the Language Branch. Beyond the number of courses held or participants trained, was the broader variety of class offerings. For instance, management type courses grew from just two classes in 1971 to five courses in 1972. Tan, who drew up the management training curriculum, pointed out that the subject of ‘management’ in those days was not overly business oriented: “The emphasis was not on finance, accounting, not on that, it’s mainly on management and

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53 Language classes were also conducted by an external Adult Education Board initially. Leadership Training eventually disappeared from the STI’s collateral material. STI, *Training Programme 1975*, Jan 1975 1.1.
administration [of personnel]. Vocational courses also increased from four to nine, attesting to the STI's growing capacity. Still, in proportion to the overall strength of the civil service, at around 63,000 at that time, the 1,287 civil servants trained by the STI represented only 2% of the whole bureaucracy.  

An examination of the training activities indicated that STI essentially embraced the roles played by the former Political Study Centre and Staff Training Centre. A dual emphasis was apparent: dedicated training for the top echelon of the bureaucracy and providing training opportunities to the lower strata of the Public Service.

### Table 6.7: Courses conducted by Staff Training Institute, 1972

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>No. Held</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Induction Courses</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>267</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Officers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Executive Officers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence Executive Officers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Assistants</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Courses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Administrative Officers Course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration in Action</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Management Course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar on Perspectives in Personnel Administration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officers Course (Intermediate)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialised &amp; Vocational Courses</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>476</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Development &amp; Analysis Course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Computers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of Financial Statements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster Reading</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Officers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registry Supervisors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registry Clerks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-typing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Training</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward Bound School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Leadership Training Institute</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Training</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>238</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Education Board</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Courses for the leadership corps of the bureaucracy were receiving distinctly greater amount of attention. In its first year of operation, the STI had substantially more courses for officers in Divisions 1 and 2: while those in Divisions 3 and 4 only had three

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54 Tan Thiam Soon, Interview with Author, 21 Nov 2012.
55 *Estab List 1974-1975* 8 indicated the total number of civil servants then was 63,050.
56 Consolidated from John Tan (1973) 8-10.
courses, those in the higher echelon had 10 courses. Divisions 1 and 2 officers also had more differentiated development opportunities, with intermediate level management courses already on offer. These attested to the greater amount of time and attention by STI staff to focus on the training of officers in Divisions 1 and 2. Induction courses for the Administrative Service officers also saw the mustering of Permanent Secretaries and senior officers from various ministries and statutory boards as lecturers; these courses for cadets in the premier scheme of service spanned 10 days. In comparison, induction courses for the Division 2 General Executive scheme of service were only a week long; lecturers were scheduled to be “senior departmental officers and Institute staff”.57 Induction for clerical assistants in Division 3 was only three days and completely led by SIT staff.58 By 1975, the Induction Course for the Administrative Service had stretched to two whole weeks. But that for the Executive Service had been reduced to three days. By then, STI had also rolled out an “Intermediate Administrative Officers’ Course” and courses on management principles and practices for senior officers, attesting to the dedicated amount of attention at planning and designing courses specifically for the élite scheme of service and higher echelons of the bureaucracy.

6.2.5 Emphasis on the Whole Public Service

Efforts were made to emphasise STI’s role in offering training to all strata of the bureaucracy, meaning including the lower-grade rank-and-file officers: “We will have courses for Personal Assistants, Receptionists, Telephone Operators, and Counter Clerks. We have courses in the Outward Bound School and in the National Youth Leadership Training Institute for officers in supervisory positions.”59 A year later, Minister Hon Sui Sen repeated that, “STI has been running a wide range of courses for officers in different grades and different Services.”60 The intent was to point out the government’s commitment to offer training opportunities to officers in the junior grades.

The Staff Training Institute essentially succeeded the roles played by the Political Study Centre and the Staff Training Centre, albeit consolidating the training of élite and rank-and-file into one agency. The focus on training the élite was a legacy of the Political Study Centre. Indeed, the induction courses for officers of the Administrative Service and the Executive Service were previously conducted by the

58 STI, Training Programme 1975, Jan 1975 111.1-111.2.
Political Study Centre before it closed. Most of the courses for the junior grade officers, such as induction for the Clerical Service, vocational training, and language training used to be held at the Staff Training Centre. STI was built upon the foundation of earlier predecessor training schools.

Beside such core structured courses, the STI was also involved in other occasional training activities. The Institute, for instance, collaborated with the union of public service employees to conduct courses on the Government Instruction Manual. These courses were essential, even critical, as they helped new executive officers pass their probationary examinations to be emplaced and to receive a corresponding increment to their salaries. In August 1974, STI in conjunction with its parent Finance Ministry organized a seminar on “Enhancing Productivity in Government Operations” for 100 senior public officers. With the Singapore government subsequently launching a nation-wide Productivity Campaign, this could be a preparatory workshop for the changes that would be introduced across the bureaucracy, indeed, across the country.

6.2.6 The ‘Management Development’ Bulletin – The ‘Gospel of Good Management’

In September 1973, the STI and the Finance Ministry’s Management Services Unit jointly published “Management Development”. On the front page of the inaugural issue, the Minister for Finance, Hon Sui Sen, likened Management Development to an evangelist serving “to spread as widely as possible the gospel of good management, which we want to infuse the whole Civil Service.”

The periodical had an editorial board, chaired by Lim Hsiu Mei, the Deputy Secretary at the Finance Ministry overseeing personnel matters and the STI. Members of the Board included Evelyn Chew, Director STI and Robert W. Lynn, STI’s Head of Language Training.

The similarity between Management Development and the earlier Bakti cannot be missed. Bakti complemented the Political Study Centre’s courses by disseminating articles on the political context of Singapore’s state-formation process and the role expected of the bureaucracy to a wider audience across the Public Service. Likewise, Management Development sought to spread across the Public Service information on various aspects on management. The inaugural edition introduced “What is ‘management services’,” for instance, and subsequent issues explained “Management

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61 ST 2 Sep 1971: 4; Lim Ang Yong, Interview with Author, 21 Jun 2012.
by Objectives”. Most of these were contributions from officers across the public service, contrasting with Bakti’s offerings of speeches by political leaders or articles reproduced from other publications. The articles in Management Development were also relatively well written, replete with footnote and bibliographic references.

6.2.7 Evaluation of STI’s Programmes

Whether formal evaluations were undertaken on the STI’s training programmes cannot be ascertained. Among academics, only Quah reviewed that “STI was merely a training institution and did not have a research programme.”

One internal report on a single course is the only document that sheds some light on the conduct of training in STI. The report was written up by John Ewing-Chow, in his third week as a Training Officer, after attending and administering a course on Management Principles and Practice for Division 1 public officers. Ewing-Chow wrote that course participants, despite the publicity given to the STI over the years, were unfamiliar with the Institute’s role and course offerings. On the course itself, he thought that interesting sessions, such as a Management Game, were let down by vague objectives and unclear instructions. Topics on Organisation, Planning and Control would be more useful for officers with top management exposure rather than young participants. Case studies should be civil service-oriented to enhance identification with the scenarios. Between the two trainers, the civil servant rather than the academic came across to be more emphatic when acknowledging obstacles in practice. Ewing-Chow reflected that, “It is therefore a good selection principle… to bring together participants of similar ages and educational backgrounds, not only for status reasons but also for a better learning environment.” While it provides a sampling and cannot be taken as representative of all courses, it is nevertheless illuminating.

Another perspective on STI was found in an interview with J. F. Conceicao in the Management Development. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee lamented that many civil servants were focused on the mechanics of their jobs. Beyond vocational development, civil servants should appreciate their roles in relation to the community and the country:

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65 Official records pertaining to STI cannot be found in the public domain; the catalogue of the National Archives of Singapore did not list any such records. Without consulting official records evaluating the STI’s training programmes or the Institute’s performance, a fair assessment of the STI at this juncture is not fair.


the kind of orientation provided by the Political Study Centre was [thought] no longer necessary. Now surely if you take away that institution, you must devise some means of orientating people constantly to the fact that they are serving the public….Training, seems to be its just like industrial training without sending the guy to the factory. It’s a waste of time. Same thing with the training in the Civil Service, it has to be tied to career development. If you are thinking in terms of the [Executive Officer] and the chap down the line, you’re training them not only to function, but for a fulfilment of a function which if well fulfilled could entitle the chap to [promotion].

6.3 Some Comparisons

The STI’s establishment was particularly timely considering developments in civil service training across other Westminster jurisdictions. In Britain, after years of debate, the UK Civil Service College was finally set up in 1971. Proponents for a central training school for the UK Home Civil Service, with the Assheton Committee in 1944 amongst the earliest advocates, had long been tempered by institutional inclination towards on-the-job-training. The Centre for Administrative Studies set up in 1963 was a major step towards a central institution but “only a very small proportion of the civil service had access to what might be described as proper training, and this was of an exclusively introductory type.” The 1968 Fulton Committee finally provided the strongest impetus for reforming the subject of training in the bureaucracy and the Civil Service College was established in 1971.

The UK Civil Service College’s realization brought to the fore other dilemmas in civil service training. These ranged from whether academics or civil servants make the most appropriate instructors, should the curriculum be academically-rooted or oriented to the work and life of the bureaucracy, to whether the College should be headed by an academic or career-civil servant? The eventual decision was an eminent Professor Eugene Grebenik as principal and an under-secretary William Graham Bell as deputy, and the faculty was a mix between career civil servants and academics. Even so, these arrangements were by no means the final word on the long-standing debates between civil servants or academics as instructors, or even between advocates of a central training institution and those for ‘sitting next to Nellie.’ Nevertheless, the creation of a dedicated school in Britain underscored the recognition in that jurisdiction of the need for bureaucratic training.

68 “Interview with Mr. J.F. Conceicao,” MD 11(March 1976): 6. Although the article was published after the STI was renamed, the conduct of the interview in 1975 meant his views pertained to the period of the STI.
73 Bird (1992) 72.
In Hong Kong, similarly, training in the bureaucracy was gradually taking off after a late start: a Training and Examinations Unit was created under the Appointments, Training & Discipline Division within the Colonial Secretariat’s Establishment Branch in 1961.\(^\text{74}\) Its mandate was to upgrade the skill-sets of local officers in order to speed up the localisation of the Hong Kong Public Service. Considering the similar jurisdictional sizes and common colonial traditions, Hong Kong’s Training Unit was several years later than Singapore’s Staff Training School. Nevertheless, while the post-colonial Staff Training Centre languished as Singapore concentrated on political socialisation, bureaucratic training grew steadily in Hong Kong.

By 1971, a dedicated Government Training Division separated from other shared portfolios (see Table 6.8).\(^\text{75}\) It continued to coordinate internal training within various government departments, and training for civil servants in local and overseas universities.\(^\text{76}\) Its Staff Training Centre, on the other hand, was similar to Singapore’s STI, comprising language training sections and a section on General and Administrative Training. A huge number of its officers taught languages, particularly English language, but the Hong Kong context also required civil servants to be equipped with various Chinese dialects. The General and Administrative Training section carried out courses on supervisory skills, communications, administrative skills and the like, for executive officers, clerks, secretaries and other officers of rank-and-file grades. In this regard, the types of training carried out by the Hong Kong Staff Training Centre and its main targeted audience were similar with those of Singapore’s STI. The exception was management training for the leadership corps, which was the impetus for the birth of the STI against the context of a developmental state. In Hong Kong then, there were no similar management type courses for its leadership of the bureaucracy.


\(^{75}\) Hong Kong, *Report on the Public Service 1971/72*, 41, HKPRO, accession no. A/55/81/9B.

In Malaysia, with which Singapore shared a common colonial and bureaucratic tradition, the Staff Training Centre set up between 1959 and 1963 had by 1972 graduated into a National Institute of Public Administration (Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara, INTAN).\(^77\) While the British neglected training during their “leisurely pace” of colonial “maintenance role,” independence and development highlighted the need for administrative training.\(^78\) Interestingly, apart from remedying “deficiencies in the existing training systems,” INTAN’s creation was catalysed by two ‘stimuli’:

First, there was growing awareness within the civil service of its role as an agent of change and the consequent need to equip itself for this role. Second, there was pressure from the ADS [Administrative and Diplomatic Service], the \textit{élite} bureaucratic cadre, whose members felt “threatened by a gradual but steady diminution of power” brought about in part by their relative inability to cope with the new demands made on them, systematic training and career development was seen as an immediate need in the process of ‘rejuvenating’ the \textit{élite} cadres.\(^79\)


\(^79\) Marican (1979) 11, quoting extracts from Staff Training Centre, Malaysia, and Development Administration Unit, Malaysia, \textit{Training and Development in West Malaysia} (Kuala Lumpur: Prime Minister’s Department, 1969).
INTAN’s mission was similar to Singapore’s STI, providing induction, basic training and refresher training. But its aim of “training for career development” was more ambitious, which INTAN appeared capable of delivering.\textsuperscript{80} From 1970, INTAN was partnering with local universities to conduct courses on management science and public administration leading to the conferment of diplomas.

Currently available records and those officials interviewed for this study indicated that there were no references to Malaysia’s experience when the STI was being set up. The striking similarities in the respective circumstances leading up to the setting up of Singapore’s STI and Malaysia’s INTAN could be due to the near identical geographical-jurisdictional context and colonial bureaucratic tradition. Quah certainly attributed British negligence of structured training, favouring on-the-job training, as reasons for the late development of civil service training in both former UK colonies, compared to the rest of Southeast Asian states.\textsuperscript{81} In any case, compared with developments in other Westminster jurisdictions, the STI was a timely catching-up in civil service training for Singapore.

6.4 Conclusion

Against the context of the Singapore developmental state, the Staff Training Institute was set up for the purpose of building up the capacity of the Administrative Service corps to manage the country’s rapid economic development. The context of the developmental state loomed large when the period in this chapter is examined through the conceptual framework. From the prism of the state, the political leadership’s grand strategic goal was evidently to focus on rapid, large-scale, state-led economic development. This developmental state goal in turn highlighted the perspective from which senior ranks of the bureaucracy contemplated the situation: a lack of management skills among civil servants to lead, plan, regulate and manage the developmental state.

The Staff Training Institute was meant to be the point through which public officers were introduced to and equipped with management skills. In the face of competition for limited qualified manpower, STI was part of an overall effort to boost public sector HR management, to attract and retain good public officers. STI, all considered, was thus set up as a point to reform the Public Service.

\textsuperscript{80} Omar (1980) 272-273.
\textsuperscript{81} Jon S.T. Quah, “Study of Public Administration in the ASEAN Countries,” \textit{International Review of Administrative Sciences} 46 (1980): 358. Quah identified STI as Singapore’s first training school, discounting the Political Study Centre or the Staff Training Centre as bureaucratic training schools.
In the evolution of training in Singapore’s bureaucracy, the STI represented a return to the traditional functions of competency training, after a momentary neglect due to the priority accorded to using training for political socialisation. Quah observed that, “STI reflects a shift in emphasis from the political training courses of the PSC [Political Study Centre] to more practical and comprehensive training programmes for civil servants.” After ten years of continued rule, the hold of the People’s Action Party government over the state was sufficiently secured and political socialization was no longer as compelling as at the onset of self-government.

But, at the same time, focusing on technical competencies was also a natural progression from the Political Study Centre. The Political Study Centre had succeeded in aligning civil servants into sharing the worldview of the PAP government. Assured of a dependable bureaucracy and their civil servants’ loyalty to the new state, the focus could shift towards building up the technical competencies of the Public Service, and – hence – the STI. As the successor to the Political Study Centre, the purpose of the STI was to build up basic competencies and management skills.

Furthermore, the shift in training policy towards technical skills was recognition that basic training in the civil service had largely been neglected in the period following independence and before the establishment of STI. For a government that ostensibly recognized the value of training, having harnessed training to socialize the bureaucracy, how did the PAP allow such an eclipse in the priority of bureaucratic training? The answer is likely that the PAP had competing priorities in the wake of independence, and civil service training had become a casualty of the primary goals of rapid development.

The preoccupation with the urgent tasks of state-building and competing pull on limited resources in the aftermath of independence might have led to an unconscious distraction from civil service training. This risk was articulated by the civil servants responsible for leading training. John Ewing-Chow and Miss Teo Hee Lian, two trainers who started out their careers with the STI and rose eventually to become directors of the civil service school, wrote years later that, “The 1970s was … a time when the priority going to pressing issues related to economic restructuring, housing, health, education, and defence, further development of training in the public sector had to take a back seat.” In this regard, establishing STI was more than a shift from political socialization to practical training; it represented renewed emphasis on training in the Singapore Public Service.

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83 Ewing-Chow and Teo (1982) 3.
The STI was not modelled after any foreign civil service training organisations in other jurisdictions. Records available and officials interviewed attested to no references to the British Civil Service College, the French *Ecole Nationale d’Administration*, the Malaysian INTAN or any other foreign bureaucratic schools, in the setting up of the STI. The STI was Singapore’s exploration of its own approach towards training, an experiment to plug the gap of management training among civil servants amidst the needs of the developmental state. This streak to go its own way could reflect distrust or an eschewing of foreign models; at the same time, it also reflected a sense of growing confidence within the bureaucracy, or the government, of its own budding competencies and capabilities. Without the boundaries of foreign models, the STI was certainly able to customise its structure, goals and activities to local necessities, and took into consideration local constraints. For example, it was able to work around the lack of management expertise within the bureaucracy by seeking for the secondment of academics to build up capacity in this domain. In all purposes, the STI represented an experiment on the part of the Singapore Public Service in training.

All its efforts notwithstanding, the STI and its work should not be exaggerated. It was always a small organisation, with 45 officers by 1974, of which 12 were in direct training positions. Especially stark was the lack of expertise to conduct management training, with only 4 trainers even when supplemented by seconded academics. Of the 56 courses the STI conducted in 1972, only five – or less than 10% - were management courses. All 15 leadership courses were experiential types undertaken on its behalf by external agencies. The bulk of the STI courses were functional and vocational courses. This concentration on training the rank-and-file of the bureaucracy hierarchy appeared to have reversed, even subverted, the original intent of setting up the STI to equip the Administrative Service officer with management skills.84

Unsurprisingly, while the STI might have publicised its mission and training activities formally, it was apparently not well recognised even among public officers. The STI’s organisational goals were set out by the Minister for Finance, and courses were offered across the Public Service through regular circulars. In 1975, the STI even published a *Training Prospectus* setting out in details its objectives and its offerings of training courses. Yet, in reality, the STI was not very well recognised among public officers, as evidenced by Ewing-Chow’s report on a course. Several course participants had queried STI staff on what was the STI, what were its roles, who were the staff of the STI and what were the courses available at the STI. Hence, for all the STI’s

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84 Sim (1985) 22.
professed official mission and goals, in reality, it was not really well known among public officers, its intended clientele.

The Staff Training Institute appeared from the start to be a temporary milestone towards a larger and longer term scheme of training. Even as Flagstaff House was being renovated into the STI in 1971, the plan was already laid to eventually locate the Institute with a Civil Service Centre to be set up in the former Tanglin Barracks.\textsuperscript{85} Within two years, the STI’s Lorong Langsir premises had become inadequate for the expanding needs of the STI. However, rather than the scheduled relocation to Tanglin, plans were unveiled in 1973 to move STI to Kent Ridge where “the present extent and scope of activities will be intensified.”\textsuperscript{86} In 1975, following the move to the brand new complex, the Public Service’s training school was renamed the Civil Service Staff Development Institute, thus ending the tenure of the Staff Training Institute from 1971 to 1975.

\textsuperscript{86} John Tan (1973) 8.
CHAPTER 7
Symbolism and Tinkering: The Civil Service Staff Development Institute and the Civil Service Institute (1975 – 1996)

This chapter examines the central training school of the Singapore Public Service between 1975 and 1996. Although the school was known as the Civil Service Staff Development Institute and then the Civil Service Institute, the two names referred to the same organisation and hence merit discussion under the same banner. The 20-year period is addressed in three parts to draw out the various stages in the school’s evolution.

In 1975, the Staff Training Centre changed its name to the Civil Service Staff Development Institute as it moved to new and modern premises, and attempted to extend ‘training’ into more comprehensive staff ‘development’. The first part of this chapter examines the context leading up to this new phase of training in the Singapore bureaucracy. CSSDI helped to improve training but various difficulties hindered its development, particularly the CSSDI’s capacity to cater for senior executive development.

The second part of this chapter deals with the Civil Service Institute. While the name change from CSSDI was no more substantial than nominal, the Institute did begin to grow in capacity and training offerings in the 1980s. Through its expanding range of courses, especially those on language, productivity and computerisation, the CSI was introducing changes and reforms into and across the Public Service.

The third part of this chapter addresses the changes and challenges facing the CSI. In particular, the tension between broad-based training and developing the élite was brought to the fore with the gradual evolution of the CSI into a training institution for the whole Public Service. This aspiration contrasted, at least in the eyes of the Public Service leadership, with the CSI’s inability to provide leadership development programmes for the élite Administrative Service officers. By the early 1990s, the establishment of a separate training centre for AOs ended the CSI’s monopoly of training in the bureaucracy. In 1996, the CSI was reorganised into a department within a new civil service college. Thus, the CSI’s 20-year tenure as a separate and sole central training school of the Public Service came to an end.
7.1 Heng Mui Keng Terrace and the CSSDI: A Quiet Graduation

In June 1975, Management Development announced that: “The Civil Service Staff Development Institute (CSSDI), formerly known as Staff Training Institute, has moved to its permanent premises in Heng Mui Keng Terrace, off Pasir Panjang Road.”

This allocation of a brand new building to the CSSDI was noteworthy: until then, the Public Service’s schools had been set up in existing government quarters. In contrast, facilities in the new building were state-of-the-art: a 185-seat lecture theatre with the latest sound system, cinema projector and motorized screens was complemented by syndicate rooms, language laboratories, a library and a 52-room hostel. One CSSDI staff recalled that at that time, “CSSDI had the most modern building and office in the whole Civil Service.”

The context against which the new facilities were allocated to CSSDI was noteworthy. Singapore in the late-1960s and early-1970s, as mentioned in the last chapter, had embarked upon rapid state-led economic development, or what Chalmers Johnson called developmental-state. The dividends from this economic development made possible wide-ranging infrastructural and social development. Economic growth also allowed the development of the bureaucracy and its associated programmes.

In 1975, oil crises and instability in Indo-China threatened to derail Singapore’s locomotive of rapid development. Singapore’s economic growth dipped to 4.1%. But compared with the recession among OECD countries (that recorded a negative growth of -2.25%), Singapore was staying afloat “without wage cuts, high unemployment and great social strain”. Early diversification into the services sector allowed Singapore to buck the global trend. The other reason for Singapore’s resilience was its 6% increase in public expenditure, primarily infrastructural expansion.

However, CSSDI’s new building was actually not part of this expansion in public expenditure. Apparently, the building was originally planned as Singapore’s contribution to the United Nations. One former permanent secretary recounted:

The CSSDI building at Heng Mui Kheng Terrace – this was originally designed and built to accommodate a UN-sponsored regional training and development institute under the auspices of ESCAP [Economic and Social Commission for

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3 Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.
6 SAR 1976 8, 14 and 21; Cheng (1991) 197.
the Asia and the Pacific] but, owing to differences between ESCAP officials and Singapore authorities on immunities, privileges and benefits to be extended to UN personnel to be attached to and engaged for the UN-sponsored institute, the offer to ESCAP to host the institute in Singapore was rescinded by the Singapore government; the building and facilities were, on completion, handed over to a newly formed CSSDI for use for its programmes and courses.⁸

More significantly, the name change from ‘Staff Training Institute’ to ‘Civil Service Staff Development Institute’ reflected, according to Miss Evelyn Chew, the director overseeing the transition, the institute’s direction towards ‘staff development’.⁹ Chew’s supervisor, Miss Lim Hsiu Mei, Deputy Secretary (Personnel Administration Branch), concurred that the name change represented a progression from “mere training to a higher level of developing staff across the entire civil service.”¹⁰ Hence, the name-change with the move to new facilities in Heng Mui Keng reflected an elevation in training.

7.1.1 Organisational Structure

The CSSDI reported to the Personnel Administration Branch of the Ministry of Finance’s Budget Division¹¹ (see Table 7.1). This reporting line was a continuation from that of STI although the MOF, following a reorganisation, had undergone some changes. The earlier Treasury Division was renamed Budget Division which continued to oversee PAB (compared Table 7.1 with Table 6.3). Hence, to the bureaucracy, human resources remained a subject of resourcing and training part of personnel management.

The CSSDI also received policy direction on the training of Division 1 officers from the Establishment Unit in the Prime Minister’s Office, signalling the government’s attention to “an urgent situation … to spot talent at the top”,¹² “because of the void in numbers of able officers in the 30 to 45 age group caused by many promising officers

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¹⁰ Lim Hsiu Mei, Deputy Secretary (Personnel Administration Branch), MOF, 1975, email correspondence with Author, 17 Jan 2013. In Directory 1975: 123, the subjects under Lim’s oversight included “Career Development, Training.”
¹² Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister, Parliamentary Debates, 16 Mar 1976, columns 333-334. Officers from Divisions 2, 3 and 4 continued to be managed by the MOF Establishment Branch and the Public Service Commission.
Table 7.1: CSSDI in the Singapore Government, 1975

President

Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Law
Ministry of Home Affairs
Ministry of Communications
Ministry of Labour
Ministry of National Development
Ministry of Science & Technology
Ministry of the Environment
Ministry of Culture
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Social Affairs

Budget Division
Development Division
Revenue Division

Budget Branch
Expenditure Control Branch
Personnel Administration Branch

CSSDI

Table 7.2: Structure of the Civil Service Staff Development Institute, 1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Miss Evelyn Chew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Section</td>
<td>Robert Walker Lynn (Head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Training Section</td>
<td>Tan Thiam Soon (Head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration Section</td>
<td>John Tan (Head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 3 Language Education Officers
- 2 Language Laboratory Technicians
- 2 Senior Training Officers (Management Training)
- 3 Training Officers (Management Training)
- 3 Executive Officers
- 9 Clerical Officers & Assistants
- 3 Typists
- 1 Telephone Operator
- 2 Driver & Despatch Rider
- 5 Caretaker & Watchmen
- 3 Office Attendants
- 1 Library Officer
- 1 Library Attendant

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leaving to join the private sector in the years of rapid economic growth.”

Internally, the CSSDI’s structure remained the same as that of the STI (compare Table 7.2 with Table 6.5 in Chapter 6).

7.1.2 Personnel Staffing

The CSSDI continued to have about the same staff establishment as the STI. Tan Thiam Soon and Robert W. Lynn remained Heads of Management Training and Language respectively but both left soon after, and the positions became vacant.

Lynn had identified a successor before his departure. Miss Teo Hee Lian, a young Administrative Service officer had impressed the CSSDI faculty while attending induction. Transferring her to the CSSDI was not easy as AOs were typically posted to policy-making positions in ministries but Teo eventually became a CSSDI Language Education Officer. Internal constraints aside, competition from the private sector was another issue. When the CSSDI sent Management Training Officer, John Ewing-Chow, for post-graduate studies, he had to avoid business-related fields such as Masters in Business Administration to avoid exposing him to private sector poaching. Difficulties in recruiting staff with administrative experience and training expertise continued to hinder the CSSDI’s capacity build-up.

7.1.3 Objectives and Training Activities

The CSSDI was officially opened by the Minister for Finance on 10 Mar 1976. Its aims were similar to those of STI, primarily: “Making officers aware of modern management concepts and tools and showing them how these can be applied in the Service”. Courses remained ‘free’ for public officers; CSSDI continued to rely on the Finance Ministry’s budget to run its training activities.

More significant was a new mapping of CSSDI programmes with the career development of public officers. This appeared to follow a parliamentarian’s feedback,

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15 Circular by Head of the Civil Service, quoted by Lee Kuan Yew, Parliamentary Debates, 16 Mar 1976, column 334.
16 Of the total complement of 41 officers, 10 were directly involved in training duties. Estab List 1974-1975: 8.
17 Tan Thiam Soon, Interview with Author, 21 Nov 2012; Teo Hee Lian, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012.
18 Posted to the CSSDI in 1976, Teo went to the University of Lancaster for a Master’s degree in linguistics in 1977, and returned to the CSSDI in 1978. MD 30 (Jan 1981): 16; Teo Hee Lian, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012
as mentioned in the previous chapter.\footnote{“Interview with Mr. J.F. Conceicao,” MD 11 (March 1976): 6.} Whether Conceicao’s comments prompted a review leading to this training-career linkage or resulted from ongoing deliberations in the government is not clear. Regardless, this was the first instance the career development of officers was factored into the planning of training in the Public Service.

Mapping training to career progression was particularly evident at Division 1, especially for the Administrative Service officers (see Table 6.2). Recruits would attend induction within six months of joining the Public Service.\footnote{Training Programme 1976: I.1 and III.1; ST 12 Apr 1976: 13.} Upon assuming managerial functions, officers would return to the CSSDI for management courses. Deputy Secretaries and Principal Assistant Secretaries would attend advanced management courses. All AOs would also return for monthly seminars to enhance their understanding of policies and policy-making processes.

The training and career development of Division 1 officers were better developed than that of lower grades. Division 2 officers only had an induction programme, and, courses in supervision, and financial and personnel administration.\footnote{Training Programme 1976: I.2.} The greater attention to the higher grades was magnified when examining the course-career development mapping for officers below Division 2: there was none.

This emphasis on Division 1 arose from the bureaucracy’s inherent focus on developing its \textit{élite}. From the beginning, the government concentrated on cultivating the premier Administrative Service as its ‘Praetorian Guard’\footnote{Ngiam Tong Dow, Interview with Author, 10 Jan 2013.}.\footnote{Thomas Bellows, “Bureaucracy and Development in Singapore,” Asian Journal of Public Administration 7.1 (Jun 1985): 61.} The Administrative Service, as mentioned in earlier chapters, was raised originally in the colonial bureaucracy and modelled after the British administrative class. Since self-government, AOs had been recruited from among the best and brightest of Singapore society, typically identified from those who aced pre-university examinations and awarded government scholarships for undergraduate studies. The \textit{élite} status of the Administrative Service was fed by its exclusivity: while Executive Service officers in Division 2 could be promoted into the Administrative Service up to the 1970s (see previous chapter), political scientist Thomas Bellows asserted in the 1980s that “there is little movement from Division II to Division I.” The government’s commitment to prioritising the Administrative Service was reiterated in 1979: “whatever the changes to the professional or other services, the pre-eminence of the Administrative Service will
be the cornerstone of all services. The CSSDI's focus on the highest echelons of the bureaucracy was thus driven by the government’s long-standing focus on cultivating the élite Administrative Service.

In reality, the training-career development mapping appeared more aspirational. Some of the courses prescribed to various levels of officers’ career progression were already in place or could be readily rolled out, such as induction and seminars for Administrative Service officers. However, some courses could not be easily carried out, such as the advanced management courses for Deputy Secretaries. The need to rely on foreign trainers, as it eventually did, hinted at the lack of expertise within the CSSDI to carry out management training beyond its existing suite of courses for mid-level AOs. Three academics from the University of Southern California were eventually brought in, through the personal efforts of Evelyn Chew, to run advanced management courses between 1975 and 1977. But the high costs involved required sponsorship from the Asia Foundation and when that funding dried up, the gap in the CSSDI’s capacity in senior executive development curriculum was once again starkly exposed.

7.2 From the CSSDI to the Civil Service Institute

On 27 Feb 1979, the Prime Minister called a meeting that was to affect the CSSDI. Lee Kuan Yew was unhappy with the verbose language of memoranda reaching his desk. “[This] steady deterioration over the last 20 years,” he warned ministers and civil servants, “If we do not make a determined effort to change, the process of government will slow down. It will snarl up.” The transcript of the discussion thereafter recorded his response to a reference to the CSSDI: “Prime Minister: Can’t we find a better name for CSSDI. Find a word that conveys the meaning instead of an acronym which does not convey any.”

Overnight, Kirpa Ram Vij who took over as CSSDI Director earlier in the year, recalled that the Civil Service Staff Development Institute became the Civil Service Institute. But its objectives, as other aspects, were similar with those of the CSSDI:

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29 Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011; Training Programme 1977: II.5 & III.3; CSSDI; John Ewing-Chow, Secretary, Task Force, “Paper on the Background to the INSEAD Report,” undated, JEC Papers.


31 Ibid

Table 7.3: CSSDI and Civil Service Institute, 1979

Director
Kirpa Ram Vij

Language Section
Roger Thomas Bell (Head)
- 3 Language Education Officers
- 1 Lang. Laboratory Technician

Management Training Section
Dr. Henry Hunter Meyer (Head)
Alfred York (Head, from Sep 1979)
- 2 Training Officers Division I
- 3 Training Officers Division II

Administration Section
Miss Jeyamalar (Training Administrator)
- 3 Executive Officers
- 9 Clerical Officers & Assistants
- 3 Typists
- 1 Telephone Operator
- 2 Driver & Despatch Rider
- 5 Caretaker & Watchmen
- 3 Office Attendants

Library
Miss Chan Chwee Yin (Assistant Librarian)
- 1 Library Officer

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(a) Orienting newly recruited officers to the Service;
(b) Equipping officers with basic administrative skills; and
(c) Making officers aware of modern management concepts and tools and showing them how these can be applied in the Service.\(^{34}\)

A more significant development was the establishment of a Training Advisory Council (TAC) “to advise the CSI on the development and management of its training programmes, and to review periodically its activities and progress.”\(^{35}\) The TAC comprised the Head of the Civil Service, Permanent Secretaries from the Prime Minister’s Office and Finance Ministry, Secretary of the Public Service Commission and Director of the CSI. While reminiscent of the earlier STI Steering Committee, the work of the TAC was to be much more significant.

7.2.1 The Administrative Staff College Proposal

Among the Training Advisory Council’s first tasks was to review a recommendation to upgrade the CSI into a Singapore Administrative Staff College (SASC). This was tabled by two professors from the European Institute of Business Administration (INSEAD), arising from a French government offer to help train Singapore’s public officers: “a high quality, prestigious SASC should be set up to provide continuing education in public administration and management to senior officers in the Civil Service.”\(^{36}\) This SASC should be structured under a new ministry or department of Public Service and guided by a high-powered Board of Governors. In the long term, the INSEAD team envisioned the SASC to play a leading role in providing ideas, promoting concepts, methods and organising talks given by visiting scholars or foreign personalities. If the College is successful in reaching excellence, it could ultimately play a regional role in opening its doors and facilities to neighbouring countries.\(^{37}\)

A key element of the proposal was a faculty team: selecting from among the Administrative Service, six officers with a minimum of six years of service and Principal Assistant Secretary or Deputy Secretary-grade. After one year training at INSEAD, the six AOs would devote four years to developing various programmes at the Staff College. The Training Advisory Council’s interest in the INSEAD proposal was particularly piqued by the need to plug the gap of senior-level executive training. Except for a few advanced management courses by visiting academics years ago, the

\(^{34}\) Civil Service Institute, *Civil Service Institute Training Programme 1980* (Singapore: CSI, 1980) 1.

\(^{35}\) Ewing-Chow and Teo (1982) 7.

\(^{36}\) “A summary of the report of the study of the training needs of the higher echelons of the Singapore Civil Service,” undated, p. 3, JEC Papers.

CSI had not been able to provide appropriate training for Administrative Service officers above the Assistant Secretary-grade. This gap in the CSI’s leadership development capacity was, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, begging to be plugged.

For a more in-depth review of the Administrative Staff College proposal, the TAC set up a dedicated task force. Kirpa Ram Vīj, the CSI Director, was also sent to evaluate the British Civil Service College, French Ecole Nationale d’Administration and INSEAD. This was the furthest Singapore had gone to entertain foreign models of bureaucratic training.

The Political Study Centre (1959 – 1969), set up after self-government to socialise civil servants away towards a closer appreciation of their political context, had no precedent, overseas or locally. The Staff Training Institute (1971 – 1975) was not modelled after any foreign training schools, based on available archival records and the knowledge of officials interviewed. The CSSDI/CSI, though a progression in training, also continued in not taking any reference from overseas models, according to staff who were involved. Against this background, the deliberations of the INSEAD proposal and the studies of the British and French civil service schools indicated the lengths the Singapore Public Service was venturing to plug the gap in the development of its leadership.

On his return, Kirpa Ram Vīj recommended support for the INSEAD proposal and this was taken into consideration by the task force. After deliberations, the task force also endorsed the INSEAD proposal. Suggesting that the most optimal approach was upgrading the CSI into the Administrative Staff College, the task force detailed a possible organisational structure for the SASC (see Table 7.4).

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38 Vīj, Interview with Author, 22 Jan 2013.
Table 7.4: Proposed Structure of the SASC

Rather than a faculty team of six Administrative Service officers, the task force projected that four AOs would suffice. It saw the Principal of the College and the Director of Studies (Staff College) to be the same officer, and three more AOs to staff the Advanced Management Training section. Two CSI staff would be responsible for Foundational Training and provide the continuity when the AOs would be posted out after the expiry of their term. Another slight deviation from the INSEAD report was the task force’s recommendation for the four AOs to be at least super-scale officers, i.e. Deputy Secretary-grade and higher than the Assistant Secretary and Principal Assistant Secretary-grades in the original proposal. Further, the task force asserted that the four AOs forming the faculty team should possess “relevant post graduate degree (which should not be restricted to just an MBA/MPA or its equivalent)”. The task force thought that training at INSEAD for the four Deputy Secretaries could be reduced from one year to nine months. The Advanced Management Course, the main SASC course, was envisioned to span over four months and comprised of between 20 and 39 participants per course.

Kirpa Ram Vij recalled that the Training Advisory Council spent a long time deliberating over the Administrative Staff College, and the CSI waited for a decision on the six or four Administrative Service officers to form the faculty team. The proposal was eventually not agreed to, because the Public Service senior leadership did not want to forego experienced AOs from line operational positions for such long periods of

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40 Ibid. MBA referred to the degree of Masters in Business Administration, and MPA to Masters in Public Administration degree.
41 Vij, Interview with Author, 22 Jan 2013.
time. But that decision would take some time to emerge, as the TAC and the Public Service leadership continued to consider the proposal.

7.2.2 Leadership Development

Meanwhile, the TAC completed a review of the training of Administrative Service officers. A four-phase AO training plan was introduced, beginning with a Foundation Course for recruits, progressing to management seminars for mid-ranking officers, and finally seminars for Permanent Secretaries and senior officers. Current management courses could then accommodate more Executive Officers and other Division 2 officers.

The Foundation Course was most comprehensively developed. Its aim was to foster *esprit de corps* among new Administrative Service officers and “expose the trainees to the political, social, economic, cultural and administrative environment of Singapore and the neighbouring countries.” As these AOs “were all coming back from Oxbridge”, John Ewing-Chow (who helped conceptualise the course) explained that, “Many of them still hankered after the Western, basically British experiences, like the musicals and concerts in London. … I felt they needed to be brought back to reality. So they had to spend some time in Meet-the-People sessions.” Observing Meet-the-People sessions, essentially clinics where parliamentarians met residents appealing for help, returned scholars could better appreciate the “problems and issues that affect the ordinary citizen, and become more sensitive drafters of policies during their careers.”

With nights spent at Meet-the-People sessions, daytime formal curriculum was made up of Induction, Management and Written English modules. Teaching methodology emphasized practicality: between lectures and discussions were problem-solving exercises, case studies, role-plays and management games aimed at knowledge application. The curricular was remarkable in the devotion to nurturing these cadets, such as learning – at a modeling agency – “table manners, how to sit, stand, dress, open and shut doors and make formal introductions.” Classes also visited every Permanent Secretary,

so that the trainees can understand each Permanent Secretary’s thinking and style of working (the trainees will have to work closely with the Permanent

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42 Ewing-Chow and Teo (1982) 11, also 7.
44 Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.
47 Sim (1985) 50.
Secretary during their careers) and can understand each Ministry’s policies and functions and so see their own work in relation to that of the whole civil service.\footnote{Ewing-Chow and Teo (1982) 12.}

Capping the Foundation Course was a tour of the capitals of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to expose AOs to these countries.

The Foundation Course represented the Public Service’s investment in nurturing its leadership at a very early stage of their careers. For the Public Service to forego two to three months of deployable manpower, having funded these officers through three to four years of overseas education, was a determined and disciplined commitment towards the long term development of these officers. The costs of the ASEAN tour were considerable, as \textit{Ewing-Chow} related that Singapore embassies in the region “looked after us, provided the logistics, hotels, transport, visits to our counterparts.”\footnote{Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.} The Civil Service College today still continues to run the Foundation Course along the same format, albeit with updates, attesting to the usefulness of that concept developed by the CSI in the 1980s.\footnote{CSC, “Milestone Programmes,” Web 6 Jun 2011: \url{http://www.cscollege.gov.sg/page.asp?id=55&pf=1}.}

A programme tested out at this time, rather than deliberately planned, was the Organisational Management seminars by Moneim \textit{El-Meligi}.\footnote{“Speech by John Ewing-Chow, Director, CSI, at the opening of the CSI-INTAN Joint Course on Leadership and Organisational Management for Senior Officers of Malaysia and Singapore Civil Services,” 21 May 1984, p. 4, JEC Papers.} A professor from Rutgers University, \textit{El-Meligi} had put his years of worldwide consultancy with major corporations into a series of OM seminars. In 1981, the CSI organised a test-run where Public Service leaders were billeted into hotels for seven days to insulate them from any disruptions, in order to focus on issues of leadership and people management. The permanent secretaries and chief executives were so impressed that \textit{El-Meligi}’s OM seminars became a regular feature on the CSI’s calendar. \textit{Ewing-Chow} recalled, “When else can you get busy PSs and CEOs to take one week off and live-in without going back to the office and interrupting their sessions? Participants had a great time learning and particularly introspecting and discovering themselves and each other.”\footnote{Ewing-Chow, email correspondence with Author, 21 Feb 2013.}

For the moment, Moneim \textit{El-Meligi}’s Organisational Management seminars filled the gap in executive training for senior officers in the Public Service.

\section*{7.2.3 Improving Language: Strengthening Command, Control and Communications}

The Prime Minister’s 1979 meeting resulted in a preoccupation on clear and concise communication by the CSI and Public Service: “The written English we want is
clean, clear prose..... not elegant, not stylish, just clean, clear prose. It means simplifying, polishing and tightening." Panels were set up in ministries to help civil servants write 'proper English'. Guidelines on writing memoranda were incorporated into the Instruction Manual regulating government procedures, and distributed across the Public Service.

The CSI was directed to intensify its language courses. The first programme was for 180 top Administrative Service officers which, CSI’s Head of Language emphasised, was not grammar remedial but for the AOs “to learn simple, clear and precise styles of writing.” Courses were also rolled out for officers down the hierarchy, including Division 2 officers, police inspectors, tax officers, etc. The increase in the number of courses CSI had to conduct did not correspond with an increase in resources, though part time staff were engaged to assist existing trainers.

In retrospect, these efforts to improve language helped professionalise the Public Service. Despite adapting itself to lead Singapore from a self-governing to a developmental state in 20 years, the bureaucracy was bogged down by communication. The severity of the problem, amplified by the Prime Minister’s personal intervention, begged the questions: was the Public Service’s leadership not aware of the problem? Had they not attempted to address this earlier? The language drive resulted in a consciousness among public officers for clearer communication. Ewing-Chow, reflecting on this episode 30 years on, assessed:

I will put this down as another important accomplishment that is often forgotten, that communication up and down the ranks, if it’s clear, concise, crisp.... I think that’s an important aspect. That’s why they are still at it. The job is never done. How many years later, through our education system, the people are still not writing the way they should write. So that’s important.

In a population where the majority’s mother tongues are not English, the language environment even for those speaking English as the first language can be corrosive. Despite English-education replacing Chinese-medium schools over the years, the Civil Service College still teaches written communication to facilitate the

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54 “PM: Improve your English,” MD 24 (June 1979): 3.
55 Language Section, CSI, Handbook on Written Communication (Singapore: CSI, undated); ST 13 Apr 1979: 1.
57 A notable instructor engaged to help the CSI in English courses was Mrs Joanna Hennings, the wife of the UK High Commissioner to Singapore and a former UK civil servant and English teacher. ST 4 Jan 1979: 7.
58 Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.
Public Service’s communication, command and control. This may be taken for granted in the bureaucracies of English-speaking countries or civil services of homogenous societies such as China, France, Japan or Korea. But clear communication in a multi-lingual society may require deliberate and determined efforts. In the case of the Singapore Public Service, recognition of the importance of clear communication began with the CSSDI’s transformation to the CSI.

7.2.4 Remaining Relevant: Productivity, Computerisation & Even Matchmaking

Meanwhile, changes in the economy and bureaucracy shaped the CSI’s evolution. In 1979, Singapore again faced global recessionary pressures, triggered by another oil crisis. The People’s Action Party government, empowered by a 78% electoral landslide, restructured the economy towards high-value products. To raise labour productivity, a national committee concluded that “for the productivity movement to gain momentum, the public sector in Singapore should set an example in improving productivity, work attitudes and human management.”

Within the Public Service, at about the same time, several studies were looking into how to attract and retain capable staff, focusing on the personnel systems of the Shell Oil Company and the French and Japanese civil services. This led to the adoption of an ‘employee-centred management philosophy’, with its aims matching those of the productivity movement: improving work attitudes and efficiency.

The CSI was tasked to operationalise the productivity movement in the Public Service by starting-up Work Improvement Teams (WITs). WITs aimed to enhance the efficiency by engaging civil servants to improve their daily work. For a quick multiplier effect, CSI adopted a train-the-trainers approach, training up WITs leaders who would return to their ministries to “spread the Gospel” by setting up more WITs and training more WITs leaders. By 1983, the CSI had trained 757 WITs leaders; 885 WITs were established throughout the bureaucracy. WITs Conventions and Management Development were other channels CSI used to propagate the productivity movement.

across the Public Service. The 1985 economic downturn – when per capita incomes fell for the first time since independence – gave WITs the impetus to expand further across the bureaucracy. By the end of the 1980s, the number of officers involved in WITs rose to 76,000 or 45% of the Public Service workforce. While it later “went off into a numbers game”, WITs laid the foundation for future waves of public sector reforms.

Another example of how training was used to introduce change in the Public Service was computerisation. Computerisation spun off from the national productivity movement and the bureaucracy was again asked to lead the way: “To stimulate computer utilisation in Singapore, it is important for the Government to take the lead and demonstrate its willingness to computerise.” The CSI started with computer ‘appreciation’ courses for senior civil servants to familiarise the leadership with the impending changes. At the same time, it partnered with the Computer Services and Management Services Departments from the Finance Ministry to launch various related courses. The computerisation drive was later taken over by the specially-created National Computer Board but the CSI played an instrumental role with the initial training to start off the computerisation programme across the Public Service.

The CSI even went into matchmaking. In 1984, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew expressed concern that women with university-degrees were deferring or foregoing marriage and procreation. If female-graduates failed to pass on their superior genes, the PM feared, the quality of Singapore’s already shrinking population would deteriorate. The uproar, together with other issues, resulted in the People’s Action Party suffering its worst electoral showing. Nevertheless, John Ewing-Chow recalled that the Public Service Division at the Prime Minister’s Office decided that “training would be an important activity to bring romance” and the CSI was tasked to play its part:

Lim Ang Yong [CSI trainer] and I designed the curriculum and did the training…. 40 guys and 40 girls met at the Bukit Timah campus. … Taught them how to dance, we made them dress, bring a suit and gown, made the guys go to the door, carry a rose and invite the girls to go down on the last day for the end of course celebration, big dinner, dancing, learning cha-cha.

With sensitivity revolving around this – what the government termed – ‘social development’ policy at that time, not much publicity was allowed on the CSI’s efforts: “I
am sorry the press cannot quote this”, Ewing-Chow apologised to reporters, “as there is a moratorium on this subject but in the lighter vein, this course must be the ultimate in promoting reproductivity among graduate civil servants.”

The CSI also proved useful in foreign policy. In 1982, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia’s premier, Mahathir Mohammad, directed, “INTAN [Malaysia’s National Institute of Public Administration] and CSI … to work together and through joint activities promote closer ties between our two countries’ civil servants.” Kirpa Ram Vij, then-Director/CSI, recalled: “[It] so happened that in [Kuala Lumpur], the guy who was running the show was a guy by the name of Talib. He was my classmate in University! So that helped a lot with INTAN.” The CSI-INTAN cooperation resulted in joint programmes on Leadership and Organisational Management, which saw participants from both the Singaporean and Malaysian civil services. Management Development also devoted an edition on Malaysia. The cooperation between the CSI and INTAN fluctuated with the ups and downs in relations between Singapore and Malaysia. In the context of this study, the CSI had once again proven its usefulness.

7.2.5 Some Comparisons

Comparison with INTAN, and other civil service schools, is timely at this juncture to locate the state of the CSI’s development. By the 1980s, INTAN had developed considerably to wield significant influence in the Malaysian civil service. As one of eight divisions in the Public Services Department (see Table 7.5), INTAN reported to the Prime Minister through the department’s Director-General, equivalent to permanent secretary, and the Chief Secretary, the highest civil service appointment. INTAN had four functional departments: Management Studies, Development Studies, Research and Consultancy, and Employee Department Centre. Under Management and Development Studies departments were several schools responsible for running courses on subjects like development administration, community development, land administration, etc. INTAN also conducted courses on supervisory and clerical training,

70 “Speech by Director, Civil Service Institute, Mr. John Ewing-Chow at the Presentation of CSI’s Programmes for FY84,” 19 Apr 1984, p. 3, JEC Papers.
72 Vij, Interview with Author, 22 Jan 2013.
74 MD 40 (Jul-Sep 1983): 1.
76 Dr Mohd Shahari bin Ahmad Jabar, Director, INTAN, MD 40 (Jul – Sep 1983): 28.
Table 7.5: The Malaysian National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), circa 1980

The Public Services Department

Chief Secretary to the Government

Director-General of Public Services

Deputy Director-General I

Deputy Director-General II

Service Division
Training & Career Devt Division
INTAN
Administration Division

Development Studies Department
Management Studies Department
Research & Consultancy Department
Employee Department Centre

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basic management training and ‘Top Management Seminars’. While the main mode of
delivery was lecture, INTAN also adopted syndicate discussions, site visits, research
projects and other learning methodologies.

INTAN played a strategic role in the personnel management of the leadership
cadre. All applicants seeking admission into the Administrative and Diplomatic Service
(ADS), the premier scheme of service in the Malaysian civil service, were required to
undergo a one-year diploma course at INTAN. The Director of INTAN reported that,
before a person is appointed to the ADS, he must get a professional certificate
from INTAN. … and the one-year training in INTAN is not easy. You have to go
through all kinds of tests. If you don’t get through it, then you will not be taken in.
And despite that, every year, for example, we have about 2,000 people applying
and we take in about 200 to 250.  

Although the Public Services Department was responsible for the posting of ADS
cadets, INTAN’s views contributed towards the posting order. The performance of
senior officers at mandatory INTAN courses also influenced their promotions to
Superscale G-grade. Occupying such central position in the selection and promotion of
the leadership, INTAN naturally commanded strong support across the civil service,
particularly its leadership.

The CSI obviously did not enjoy the same influence wielded by INTAN.
Although the CSI was responsible for the induction of the Administrative Service cadets,
the Foundation Courses had only been operating for several years, and the two or
three months at CSI were not equivalent to a whole year the Malaysian ADS cadets
spent at INTAN. Singapore’s AOs neither sat for pre-promotion courses at the CSI nor
depended on the CSI’s appraisal for their promotion. The level of identification with the
CSI among AOs was probably not strong, compared to the support INTAN would enjoy
among the Malaysian leadership corps, and this would prove critical in the subsequent
evolution of the CSI.

In Hong Kong, the Government Training Division was renamed to Civil Service
Training Division in 1971. Four years later, another name change led it to become the
Civil Service Training Centre. Beyond the name changes were a mixture of
continuation and expansion. Staff establishment doubled to 119 from the original 50

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79 Teo Hee Lian (1983) 5.
80 The 2,000 strong ADS occupied all top leadership positions in the Malaysian civil service, including
Chief Secretary and Secretaries-General, and administrative posts in central agencies. Teo Hee Lian
81 Civil Service Training Division Internal Circular No. 15/79, 12 Jun 1979, HKRS 822-1-3; Civil Service
Training Centre, Prospectus 1983-4 (Hong Kong: Civil Service Training Centre, 1983) 4-6, HK PRO; Scott
officers. The language training functions continued to feature at the Training Centre but consolidated in a Language Unit (compare Table 7.6 with Table 6.8).

The Civil Service Training Centre provided Hong Kong’s administrative officers, modelled after Britain’s Administrative Class, with induction and short courses on basic requisite skills. These included topics like staff appraisal, selection interviews, committee chairmanship, etc. But the centrepiece of the administrative officers’ training appeared to be a year of academic studies at the prestigious Oxford or Cambridge universities. Subjects covered included comparative governments, international relations, public administration and urbanisation, as well as electives ranging from economics, sociology, administrative law, constitutional law, history and philosophy.

For departmental officers at directorate grades, which were the upper echelon of the hierarchy, the Civil Service Training Centre organised seminars on new management concepts while intermediate grade officers could attend Administrative Course on management procedures and practices. Departmental officers with supervisory responsibilities at the lower rungs of the bureaucratic hierarchy could attend courses at the Training Centre on principles of supervision, communications, motivation, etc.

In comparison to Hong Kong’s Civil Service Training Centre, Singapore’s CSI had a smaller complement of staff directly engaged in training duties. Numbers apart, both Hong Kong’s Civil Service Training Centre and Singapore’s CSI had over time developed in sophistication, evident in the gradual devotion of resources in specialised subjects, especially management programmes for higher echelon officers.

In Britain, the Civil Service College set up in 1971 offered more lessons than yardsticks for comparisons. While the Civil Service College’s establishment brought to fruition arguments for formal centralised training, strong beliefs remained – particularly among the civil service leadership in Whitehall – in ‘sitting by Nellie’ on-the-job training.

Against this background, the performance of the Civil Service College was less than spectacular. Rodney Lowe, the official historian of the British Civil Service, remarked that the quality of teaching was poor: “Students’ enthusiasm for the majority of courses and their willingness to return…were both noticeable by their absence.”

Even after several years of operation, the College was only able to train 6% of the Civil Service, while departments and external providers accounted for the overwhelming

82 Miron Mushkat, “Staffing the Administrative Class,” The Hong Kong Civil Service eds. Scott and Burns 97-98 &-107.
Table 7.6: Hong Kong Civil Service Training Centre, 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civil Service Training Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Training Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Education &amp; Language Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Language Training Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Schemes Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Grades Training Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Training Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Management Training Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management Training Unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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85 Scott and Burns (1988) 126.
majority of training in the bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{86} The 1974 Heaton-Williams Committee found much of the training at the Civil Service College to be “over-academic” in nature.\textsuperscript{87} In trying to develop civil servants fast-tracked for leadership positions and simultaneously providing technical education to the broader strata of the bureaucracy, the College was deemed to lack clarity in its objectives. Lacking involvement in the work and life of the Civil Service, the College could not win the confidence of the Civil Service leadership in Whitehall.\textsuperscript{88} Unable to rise up to its remit, the newly appointed principal in 1979, Brian Gilmore, was instructed to either, “Kill it – or cure it.”\textsuperscript{89}

Despite a “revival of sorts” in the 1980s under Gilmore, Whitehall’s continuing preference for practical experience over formal training meant that the Civil Service College remained at the periphery of the bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{90} The advent of New Public Management turned the College into an Executive Agency in 1989, having to compete with the private sector for the training-dollars of government departments in order to survive. Pyper observed, “The implications of this are important … There is a marked, and increasing, diffusion of responsibility for training within the civil service.”\textsuperscript{91} Looking back years later, the official account remarked that, “the pressure of … remaining commercially competitive had driven it [the College] towards middle management training and away from strategic organisational and senior leadership concerns.”\textsuperscript{92}

The travails of the British Civil Service College through the 1970s, 1980s and into the 1990s epitomised the dilemmas of training across most bureaucracies, not least the Singapore Public Service. Should training be formal and centralised or decentralised and learning-by-doing? Should curriculum be academically-rooted or practitioner-oriented? Would scholars or civil servants make the best instructors? Should emphasis focus on developing leadership élite or should resources be distributed evenly to skilling up civil servants across the hierarchy? The tension between leadership development and broad-based training, in particular, would dominate deliberations and events in the Singapore Civil Service Institute soon enough.

\textsuperscript{86} Kevin Theakston, \textit{The Civil Service since 1945} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 105.
\textsuperscript{87} R.N. Heaton and L. Williams, \textit{Civil Service Training}, Civil Service Department, 1974, para 55, quoted in Lowe (2011) 315.
\textsuperscript{88} Theakston (1995) 102; Barry O’Toole, \textit{The Ideal of Public Service: Reflections on the higher civil service in Britain} (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 106.
\textsuperscript{89} Peter Hennessey, \textit{The Times} 11 Nov 1980, quoted in Lowe (2011) 315.
\textsuperscript{90} Theakston (1995) 103 pointed out that the ‘revival’ was also partly due to new emphasis on personnel management.
\textsuperscript{91} Pyper (1995) 45.
7.3 Changes and Challenges

In Singapore, the Civil Service Institute was to witness several significant changes as it awaited a decision on the Administrative Staff College proposal. With contracts of the expatriates expiring, local CSI staff began taking over as Heads of Language and Management Training, namely Teo Hee Lian and John Ewing-Chow respectively. In 1981, the CSI was transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Public Service Commission (PSC) to centralise the management of Division 1 officers. By the middle of that year, it had become clear that the Administrative Staff College would not materialise. Kirpa Ram Vij, who saw his CSI posting as a tasking to set up the Administrative Staff College, left the CSI.

Looking back, Vij recognised that “we were short of experienced staff to become the faculty members.” Foregoing six experienced Administrative Service officers from operational posts for five years to undertake training positions, as the proposition appeared in the eyes of the senior Public Service leadership, was simply not tenable. 30 years on, Ewing-Chow concurred that the Administrative Staff College would be ‘overkill’: “Though I envied INTAN where they had the pick of the returning postgraduate MBA and PhD AOs to teach a few years before getting promoted to operating departments and ministries, I agree that such a scheme would not be appropriate for Singapore.” With the Administrative Service cadre only 250 strong and “extremely busy fighting to survive. INSEAD’s proposal was a luxury, an overkill and it did not take into account the reality of the size of the potential students.”

At the same time, training was not a priority, despite all the rhetoric. Tan Boon Huat who was responsible for posting AOs, remembered:

To put it bluntly, at one time, the people who were posted to CSI or CSSDI, were people who were in trouble. The people who got [into] trouble in HQ or somewhere else. Problem, so exiled. That mentality! That was the mentality of the top leaders then: training not important.

With some permanent secretaries refusing to release capable staff and CSI’s reputation as a ‘sin bin’, AOs themselves were understandably reluctant to be posted to the CSI. Tan conceded: “We couldn’t get Admin Officers to go [to CSI].”

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94 PSC 1981: 21; Training Programme 1983/84:1. The Establishment Unit in the PMO came under PSC.
95 Vij, Interview with Author, 22 Jan 2013.
96 Ewing-Chow, email correspondence with Author,18 Feb 2013.
97 Ibid.
the individual said, ‘You want me to go training? Training is a dead end place!’ They didn’t see that going into training is part of their career development. But I supposed it’s chicken and egg. Part of it was the curriculum was not developed, and the value was not seen. The evolution took a long time. 99

Indeed, CSI’s development was hampered by the constant changes. The heads of the two training sections were typically changed within one to two years. In this circumstance, how much attention was available to develop rigorous curricula? Was there supervision over the implementation of these curricula; were there reviews and improvements over training activities? Was there capacity to project and draw up longer term plans?

The changes continued with Vij’s departure. The position of Director of the CSI was assigned to Teo Hee Lian. She was only 29 years old. Teo recalled:

I took over from Kirpa Ram Vij. The understanding was that it was an interim thing. I had no interest in administration. That was one of the reasons why I left the Administration Service. I had no interest in management or administration. So after a year or two, when John was definite that he would stay, I actually wrote to PSC and said I’m stepping down and he can take over. 100

John Ewing-Chow thus became the first Director of the CSI who did not hail from the Administrative Service. 101 Teo was Deputy Director while remaining as Head, Language. The Head, Management Training post vacated underwent another change to Lim Ang Yong. 102

A very important change took place in 1983. In that year, the CSI was transferred to the Public Service Division (PSD), newly created within the Ministry of Finance (see Table 7.7). 103 The PSD arose from a consolidation of all personnel management functions, including the Public Service Commission’s responsibility over the Administrative Service officers and the jurisdiction of MOF’s Personnel Administration Branch over Divisions 2, 3 and 4 officers. Although the PSD was a division within the Finance Ministry, the establishment of a permanent secretary at its head, and the Head of Civil Service as permanent secretary, meant that it was effectively a full-fledged ministry and one of higher standing than the rest. 104 This change in the CSI’s reporting lines to the PSD would – finally – be more enduring, with the CSI’s succeeding agencies continuing to report to the PSD.

99 Tan Boon Huat, Interview with Author, 14 Jan 2013.
100 Teo Hee Lian, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012. Also Teo, email with Author, 16 Jan 2013; ST 14 Aug 1981: 18.
101 All the preceding heads of the Public Service training schools had been Administrative Service officers, from Evelyn Chew, to Kirpa Ram Vij, to Teo Hee Lian.
Table 7.7: Civil Service Institute in the Public Service Division, 1983

Drawn up from information in Quek, “The Public Service Division,” MD 38 (Jan – Mar 1983): 3. Organisational units arranged according to the original documents.
As part of the centralisation efforts, CSI was eyed to take over more responsibilities, beginning with jurisdiction of all civil service examinations. Until then, examinations ranging from probationary to promotion were variously under the charge of the Public Service Commission and the Finance Ministry. The CSI demurred: “CSI’s present staff cannot cope with this new workload.”106 From 1984, nevertheless, the CSI took over responsibility of civil service-wide examinations.107 CSI was also tasked to training civil servants, particularly clerical officers, for their probationary and promotion examinations. As Sim observed, with 17 CSI-staff performing training functions and the public service totalling 147,383, the trainer to public officer ratio was 1:8,670.108

In 1984, the CSI Director took the unusual step of convening a ‘Presentation of CSI’s Programmes’ to permanent secretaries and heads of departments. Invited to the session were also members from the media, remarkable considering that Ewing-Chow’s presentation might not reflect well on the Public Service. After presenting CSI’s highlights, he appealed to the permanent secretaries and department heads to release staff for training. He also asked senior officers to support CSI’s invitation to lecture because it still lacked sufficient number of trainers to meet the range of training needs. With external lecturers costing up to $4,000 per day, permanent secretaries and department heads would be more effective and efficient. Finally, Ewing-Chow asked senior officers to counsel staff attending training: “Some come to CSI courses without knowing why they are here. Others came and realise that they are in the wrong course. Still others come for a break from their routine work.”109

The 1970s, John Ewing-Chow and Teo Hee Lian reflected, was “a time when the priority going to pressing issues related to economic restructuring, housing, health, education, and defence [and] further development of training in the public sector had to take a back seat.”110 10 years on, the CSI’s difficulties did not improve. A young Administrative Service officer at that time remembered that “my boss didn’t allow me to go” for induction.111 From reluctance to release officers to attend training or to staff the CSI, from individuals’ unwillingness to take up CSI postings to their tentative attitudes towards training, these attitudes have not abated over the years. The persistence of such attitudes could no longer be excused away by the priorities of state-building; a culture prioritising nation-building goals at the expense of training had emerged.

108 Only 17 of CSI’s total strength of 51 staff conducted training. The Public Service then comprised 83,031 civil servants and an additional 64,352 employees from various statutory boards. Sim 24.
109 “Speech by Director, CSI, Presentation of CSI’s Programmes for FY84,” 19 Apr 1984, p. 8. JEC Papers.
110 Ewing-Chow and Teo (1982) 3.
111 Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
If public sector training was overlooked in the 1970s when priorities focused on the economy, housing, education and defence, the CSI’s difficulties did not appear to have improved a decade later. A young Administrative Service officer at that time remembered that, “I didn’t even go for Foundation Course, because my boss didn’t allow me to go.” From reluctance to release officers to attend training or to staff the CSI, from individuals’ unwillingness to take up CSI postings to their tentative attitudes towards training, these attitudes did not appear to have abated over the years. The persistence of such attitudes could no longer be excused away by the priorities of state-building. Perhaps a culture had developed that prioritised nation-building goals at the expense of training and development.

For CSI, the constant changes and state of flux did not help its development. Adjustments necessitated by regular changes in superior departments, reporting lines, organisational leadership and expanding scope of activities would have prevented the CSI from drawing up longer term plans to remain relevant to the Public Service.

7.3.1 The Institutionalisation of a Civil Service Training School

By the mid-1980s, the CSI had evolved into an established institution of training for the Singapore Public Service. From 1981, Singaporean civil servants began to take over the leadership positions within the CSI. These positions had required external help since the setting up of the Staff Training Institute. The heads of language and management training were respectively an expatriate specialist and a seconded academic. When their contracts expired, these posts were left vacant for some time before other overseas expertise could be secured to fill these posts. In 1981, Singaporean civil servants were finally assessed to be capable of taking over the positions of heads of language and management training.

Parallel with this was the gradual filling up of the CSI’s established capacity. Since the setting up of the STI and through the period of the CSSDI, the civil service school had long faced difficulties in recruiting staff with the requisite skills to take up training positions. Up till 1983, the CSI had never managed to achieve its full complement of training officers. Although the establishment of the training sections provided for 20 trainers, the personnel strength averaged between eight and 10 at any one time. By 1984, the CSI was finally able to fill 13 of the 14 training positions.

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112 Ewing-Chow and Teo (1982) 3.
113 Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
The growth in capacity allowed CSI to increase its courses, including for Divisions 3 and 4 officers. Until then, the CSI “channelled most of its efforts towards training Division 1 officers because it could not get enough trainers.”\(^{115}\) Ewing-Chow, who was Director/CSI from 1981 to 1985, took the ‘public sector’ clientele in the Institute’s formal objective seriously: “I viewed the whole Public Service as my boss and CSI and I responded to requests that had national and public service wide impact.”\(^{116}\) Consequently, apart from programmes impacting across the Public Service like productivity and computerisation, the CSI expanded courses for the rank-and-file. The number of courses for Divisions 3 and 4 officers grew from four when the CSSDI was set up, to seven in 1985; in proportion to the CSI’s overall offerings, courses for the two lower divisions rose from 12.5% in 1976 to 19% in 1985 (see Table 7.8).

**Table 7.8 Number of CSSDI/CSI Courses by Divisions, 1975 - 1996\(^{117}\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Division 1</th>
<th>Division 2</th>
<th>Divisions 1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>13 (40.6%)</td>
<td>15 (46.9%)</td>
<td>4 (12.5%)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>14 (50%)</td>
<td>10 (35.7%)</td>
<td>4 (14.3%)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>19 (51.4%)</td>
<td>11 (29.7%)</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>19 (41.3%)</td>
<td>15 (32.6%)</td>
<td>12 (26%)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>50 (55.6%)</td>
<td>24 (26.7%)</td>
<td>16 (17.8%)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>73 (50.7%)</td>
<td>40 (27.8%)</td>
<td>31 (21.5%)</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>73 (48%)</td>
<td>79 (52%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Events in the mid-1980s had dramatic effects on Singapore and its Public Service but did not affect the growth of the CSI. The 1984 election resulted in the ruling People’s Action Party securing 64% popular votes but still losing two parliamentary seats to the opposition.\(^{118}\) While this would have been a landslide victory in other democracies, it was shattering for the PAP which had a complete parliamentary monopoly and over 75% popular votes since independence. To echoes of government not sufficiently heeding citizens’ voices as a key cause of electoral setback, the Public Service faced “increased pressures to be more attentive to ground feedback … to be

\(^{115}\) ST 17 Feb 1984: 13.
\(^{116}\) Ewing-Chow, email correspondence with Author, 18 Feb 2013. Also Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 28 Dec 2011.
\(^{117}\) The table tracks the number of courses across divisions from 1976 when CSSDI was set up till 1996 when CSI was absorbed into the Civil Service College. The five-yearly data projects broad trends but 1992 witnessed substantial increase in the number of courses and in each division. *Training Programme 1976; 1980; 1984/85; 1990/91; 1992/93; 1994/95, 1996/97.*
\(^{118}\) Turnbull (2009) 335.
more responsive to citizens and to view them as stakeholders with a legitimate interest in government rather than agents to be controlled.”

At the same time, the 1985 worldwide recession and Singapore’s economic review that followed led to large scale corporatisation of government functions. Accompanying the strains of ‘small government’ and new public management was the perspective to view citizens as customers. Treating citizens as customers and public communication took on added emphasis across the bureaucracy and CSI. A Public Contact Improvement Programme was developed to train frontline counter staff to “serve the public with a friendly, polite, helpful and attentive manner.” A Public Relations Planning course was also designed to train Division 1 managers in “Creativity and PR Planning… Marketing and PR Interface, The Customer Relations Process”.

The growth in CSI was particularly evident in the improvement to training for the lower strata of the Public Service. Under the leadership of David Ma Kok Leung, who became director in 1986 after Ewing-Chow left for the private sector, CSI launched the COSEC programme. Short for Core Skills for Effectiveness and Change, COSEC was a suite of courses put together for Division 3 officers to build up their “skills in communicating better, getting along with others, solving problems that arise on the job, knowing the importance and quality needs of the job, and using the computer.” By the time Teo Hee Lian resumed as director after Ma was posted out, courses for Divisions 3 and 4 officers grew to 26% of the CSI’s overall offerings. Setting aside resources to address the needs of lower-rank officers reflected a recognition, at least on the part of the CSI, that frontline staff were equally important and worthy of investment as the leadership cadre.

The quantitative and qualitative growth in rank-and-file training was in tandem with that for the Division 1 leadership and the overall course offerings for the Public Service. Courses for Division 1 officers rose steadily from 13 in 1976, or 41% of the CSSDI’s total of 32 courses, to 19 or 51% in 1985. From 1992, while the share of Division 1 courses remained largely at about half of the CSI’s expanding offerings, the absolute number of Division 1 courses swelled exponentially to 50 in 1992 and 73 in 1994. In comparison, courses for Division 2 officers lagged behind those of their senior

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121 Training Programme 1990/91: 63.
122 Training Programme 1990/91: 32.
124 Alpha Soc Newsletter 1.6 (Aug 1986): 7; Alpha Soc Newsletter 1.12 (Sep 1989): 8; Teo Hee Lian, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012; David Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013.
and junior counterparts, but only in terms of proportion of the CSI’s overall figures. The absolute number of courses for Division 2 officers actually grew to 24 in 1992 and 40 in 1990. A significant point worth emphasising is that the CSI’s efforts in expanding broad-based training were not at the expense of élite development. The evidence in Table 7.8 showed that Division 1 training had consistently constituted half of the Institute’s overall offerings of courses in the 20 year period.

The rising tide of CSI’s overall number of courses was lifting figures in all the groups, benefitting large sections across the Public Service. By 1990, the total number of course offered by the CSI had increased to 46, from 32 when it first started as the CSSDI. That year also witnessed the CSI training 31,547 civil servants, the highest figure attained by the Institute. On average annually in the 1990s, the CSI was training 20,000 officers. With the Civil Service totalling 90,246, the CSI was reaching out to 22% of the bureaucracy. In 1992, the number of CSI courses doubled to 90, and expanded further to 144 by 1994. By 1996, before the CSI was reorganised and absorbed into a new civil service college, the CSI was running 152 courses.

Amidst attaining optimal staff capacity and improvements in course offerings was an apparent sense of rising confidence within the CSI. Most evident was its 1984 engagement of the Public Service’s leadership before the eyes of the mass media. The CSI’s difficulties did not arise overnight and these would have been discussed regularly with superior and other stakeholder agencies through the bureaucracy’s routine communication channels. That the CSI chose to canvass the support of the permanent secretaries publicly hinted at a tinge of frustration with the impasse, even when the occasion was couched as the Institute’s report to stakeholders. More importantly, inviting the press to witness their accounting to and engagement with their leadership pointed to a level of boldness among the CSI’s management team, definitely not representative of the typical media-shy civil servants.

The CSI’s institutionalisation did not mean it was not without shortcomings. One study pointed out that the agencies responsible for training public officers had not developed a standardised conceptualisation of ‘training’. Training methods and evaluation lacked formalised procedures, compounded by poor supervision. These weaknesses though did not detract from improvements in institutional organisation.

126 Sim (1985) 52.
7.3.2 Ending in Tears: Questioning the Relevance of the CSI

By the mid-1980s, the CSI’s trajectory of development was pulling it away from the government’s longstanding focus on cultivating the Administrative Service élite. Although some of its programmes were geared towards the leadership cadre, the CSI was not rising up to become the AOs’ development centre. To be fair, the Staff College was curtailed not because of the CSI’s failing, but the Public Service leadership’s unwillingness to divert AOs away from policy-making posts to start the faculty team.

The CSI actually recognised the importance of developing the AOs and had prioritised resources – at the expense of training rank-and-file officers – towards training the Praetorian Guards. But the Foundation Course and other CSI programmes for AOs were in the eyes of many among its audience, “only up to that level” and poor cousins to post-graduate courses at prestigious overseas universities:

I think there [overseas universities], your exposure is different, the people who are with you, your classmates, are all very different, usually upper level.
Anyway, it’s international, very multi-faceted so it’s quite different. The Admin Officers, you also don’t want to go the local MPA.

Comparing the MPA programmes at Harvard University, for example, with in-service training at the CSI was unfair, but such was the impression in the minds of many AOs and Public Service leaders. And perceptions shaped policy.

As the CSI was seeking to improve its relevance to the Public Service, its reputation among the leadership corps was suffering. The CSI’s responses to the national call in spearheading productivity, computerisation and even ‘social development’ drives, were regarded by some among the Public Service leadership as ‘miscellaneous’:

[the Chairman] felt that at present CSI was conducting too many miscellaneous courses and had disproportionately few management development courses for Administrative Officers and senior departmental officers. He was of the opinion that if CSI concentrated on the training for this group of officers instead, there would be benefits and spin-offs for the whole of the civil service. The emphasis, therefore, should be on course to improve the management skills of the Administrative Officers, and senior departmental heads.

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127 In a paper tabled before the CSI Executive Committee in 1982, the first of four aims listed by the CSI was “Training and development for Administrative Officers,” Paper No. 8/10/82, “The Civil Service Institute – Discussion Paper,” undated, p. 2, JEC Papers. In a 1984 media interview, the CSI admitted to channelling all its resources to training Division One officers, ie., AOs, when resources were not available to train all public officers. ST 17 Feb 1984: 13.
128 Tan Boon Huat, Interview with Author, 14 Jan 2013.
129 Mid-career AOs also headed to University of London and Stanford University but Harvard University was the most well attended. Alpha Soc Newsletter 1.3 (Sep 1984): 12; 5 (Jul 1985): 10; 6 (Dec 1985): 10; 8 (Dec 1987): 12; Sim 41.
130 “Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the CSI Executive Committee,” 16 Oct 1982, p. 6, JEC Papers.
Ewing-Chow related the perception of a very senior Public Service official: “I wrote it down: CSI, image of CSI – Division 3 training.”\textsuperscript{131} Tan Boon Huat verified the impression among public officers: “it’s okay up to that level, for the clerical, the [Executive Officers] level kind of training. For the real intellectual, more challenging kind of training, you know…. [trailed off].”\textsuperscript{132} The harder CSI tried to be the training centre for the whole Public Service – expanding courses beyond those for AOs as it built up its staffing – it was increasingly seen as a training centre for Divisions 2, 3 and 4 officers, i.e., not for the leadership. The general impression of the CSI – as early as the mid-1980s – was a school for the *hoi polloi* and not capable of training AOs.

The CSI’s reputation as a broad-based training school, rather than a leadership development centre, must have further contributed to its difficulties in attracting personnel with the requisite qualities. Over time, the CSI had grown from being an ‘exile’ for officers in trouble to an established institution of training for the Public Service. Despite this, the challenge of securing talented officers to an instructional stint at the CSI persisted till the late 1980s. In particular, the Administrative Service leadership cadre of the Public Service were reluctant in taking up any CSI posting. David Ma lamented,

Not many people would like to go to CSI, maybe, as a career. Unless you like training, otherwise you may not want to be there for long. So at one point in time we actually were thinking of getting those returned scholars to be posted to CSI for a short while. Somehow CSI still failed to attract people there.\textsuperscript{133}

In 1991, local newspapers disclosed that a new Civil Service College for training the Administrative Service leadership corps was being planned. Citing a “well-placed civil service source”, the *Straits Times* revealed that this proposed institution would be “distinct from the Civil Service Institute (CSI).”\textsuperscript{134} That same year a deputy secretary had been designated as dean of the eventual college.\textsuperscript{135} In the following year, an Administrative Service officer was appointed deputy dean and visited several civil service training institutions in North America. A separate study examined the British Civil Service College and several other foreign civil service schools.

\textsuperscript{131} Ewing-Chow, Interview with Author, 11 Jun 2012.
\textsuperscript{132} Tan Boon Huat, Interview with Author, 14 Jan 2013, left unsaid that CSI was not seen to be capable of high level training.
\textsuperscript{133} Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013.
\textsuperscript{134} *ST* 24 May 1991: 30.
\textsuperscript{135} Kishore Mahbubani, Dean, Civil Service College, to Col (Res) Ho Meng Kit, Principal Private Secretary to Senior Minister, “Civil Service College (CSC),” 6 Feb 1993, p. 2, CSC Records.
The new Civil Service College formally inaugurated in April 1993. The Foundation Course, conceptualised and run for the past two decades by the CSI, and all training programmes involving AOs, were transferred to the CSC, removing the CSI’s role in training the Praetorian Guards. The monopoly of central training in the Singapore Public Service by the CSI, initially as the STI from 1971 and then the CSSDI between 1975 and 1979, had thus finally come to an end. From 1993 to 1996, the CSI became effectively a provider of vocational training. In 1996, the CSI ceased to be an independent entity following a broader reorganisation, which will be discussed in greater depth in a subsequent chapter.

In the longer term, a brand new complex housing the new CSC and several think tanks was to be built at the CSI’s existing Heng Mui Keng Terrace’s premises. Because the CSI was perceived as a training centre for Divisions 3 and 4 officers, Teo Hee Lian who had resumed as Director of the CSI since 1988, recalled:

we [the CSI] were seen as not compatible. So you can imagine how that comment went down with my colleagues. They were furious. And we were just told: make way. Some of my colleagues tried to point out that there was space there enough for everybody. But we were told: move out, because we were not compatible. … We were even told to go and look at a school. I blew my top when they told me to move to a school. I said, ‘We are not moving to an abandoned school!’

The strong sentiments brought into focus the manner in which this reorganization was approached. The government was effectively creating two centres of training: one set up for leadership development, and the proposition for the CSI could be positioned as a specialized centre for functional training. Indeed, one senior official at the Public Service Division reportedly described the CSC and CSI as “strategic” and “tactical” in their respective places in training and development. They did not need to be mutually exclusive or competitive, with each catering to different genres, and could be seen as complementary. With hindsight, requiring CSI to vacate its long-standing premises for a new entity, following closely on the directive to transfer all AO training programmes it had developed and run to the new college, came across as hurried and could be more empathetic. It reflected the establishment’s emphasis on developing the AO élite, without addressing the impacts on the CSI. To belabour the point, while CSI was allocated $5 million from the 1995 budget for the bureaucracy, this

137 Teo Hee Lian was reappointed as Director of the CSI in 1989 when David Ma was posted to the Ministry of Communications. Teo Hee Lian, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012; Alpha Soc Newsletter 1.12 (Sep 1989): 8.
138 Tan Boon Huat, Deputy Secretary, PSD, quoted in Lai 44.
Table 7.9: Internal Structure of the Civil Service Institute, 1996 139

(depicting organisation structure just before reorganisation into the Civil Service College)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Teo Hee Lian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Director</td>
<td>Lim Ang Yong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Planning & Development
  - Vacant
- Management Development Centre
  - M. Logendran
- IT Centre
  - Tina Tan
- Staff Training Centre
  - Julie Lai
- Training Consultancy
  - Dr Ang Chin Tong
- Training Administration
  - Linda Tay
- Audio-Visual

- 3 Training Officers
- 3 Programme Executives
- 1 Training Officer
- 2 Programme Executives
- 2 Programme Executives
- 4 Programme Executives
- 2 Course Secretaries
- 8 Course Secretaries
- 2 Technicians
- 1 Graphic Artist

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139 Chart depicts the CSI just before it was reorganised into the Civil Service College in 1996. Developed from information gathered from Govt Directory January 1996: 650-651. Lai reported that CSI had 60 staff with 40% of them performing the dual function of trainer and course administrator; Lai (1995) 24.
was catering to the training of more than 20,000 civil servants. In contrast, the CSC’s seemingly lesser $2 million allocation was only covering about 300 AOs and leaders in the Public Service. Greater levels of engagement and sensitivity, and more time, could have been employed to explain and carry out the organizational changes affecting the CSI and its staff.

Eventually, seemingly to sweeten the bitter pill, the CSI was offered a plot of land. Teo found some satisfaction in the design of the North Buona Vista building:

I told the architect the new building cannot look like a school, it cannot look like an office building. I gave him a brief for the new building, I said, ‘The moment you step into the building, there must be openness, there must be air, there must be feeling you are liberated, things are possible.’ … We even built in space in that building for future development. We were specifically told we cannot have more [space] than we had in Heng Mui Keng Terrace. We knew we needed more. So we built that in surreptitiously.

Even before the CSI moved into the new building, scheduled to be completed in 1998, unfolding events in the broader Public Service further affected the CSI. The Public Service Division which CSI reported to was transferred to the Prime Minister’s Office in 1994. But more dramatic changes came in 1996. The CSI was renamed the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) and merged with the Civil Service College, renamed the Institute of Policy Development (IPD), to form a new Civil Service College (CSC). Miss Lim Soo Hoon, appointed Dean of the new CSC, remembered:

bearing in mind that IPD was then called CSC, so CSI people were very upset. They said, ‘Why should we, we are twice the size of IPD, have to use the CSC name?’ … The real reason was because CSI had baggage. As I told you previously CSI was doing all these broad-based training, the levels of people they were covering, Super-scale [officers at the highest grades] all the way to Division 4. There was a certain baggage, certain brand name. … If we still called it CSI, people would still have the perception that it was the same thing. So we had to refresh it, re-brand it. And we thought that CSC was a very good name.

20 years since moving to the brand new Heng Mui Keng Terrace building as the CSSDI, the CSI ended its existence as an independent civil service training organisation.

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140 Lai pointed out that CSI’s budget also had to cover a much larger headcount and other overheads such as estate management, compared to the CSC: see Lai (1995) 51-52.
141 Teo Hee Lian, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012.
7.4 Conclusion

CSI was a focal point through which changes were introduced across the Singapore Public Service between 1975 and 1996. CSI expanded upon the foundation laid by the preceding Staff Training Institute to build up, extensively, the technical competencies of officers across the rank-and-file of the bureaucracy. As the volume and sophistication of its programmes grew, training an increasing number of civil servants, CSI evolved into an institution of training and reform for the Singapore bureaucracy.

The CSI’s two decades, the longest period of any training initiative thus far, comprised of several phases. The first few years as the CSSDI laid the foundation for subsequent growth, such as integrating modern facilities, developing staffing capacities, and mapping training courses to career development of public officers. Although the overnight name-change to the CSI was only nominal, without material changes in organisational goals or structures, it demarcated a point when the Public Service’s central training school began to develop. **The CSI, through its roles in offering language and communication courses and training in WITs and computerisation, was evidently the focal point through which reforms were introduced into and across the Singapore Public Service.** By helping to improve the language and writing of public officers, communications up and down the hierarchy and across the bureaucracy was enhanced, thereby facilitating command and control throughout the government machinery. The provision of requisite training seeded the productivity and computerisation drives across the bureaucracy, which eventually propagated across the whole country.

By the early 1980s, the CSI was evolving into an established institution of training for the Singapore Public Service. The initial difficulty with recruiting personnel with the necessary expertise was gradually overcome as seconded academics and foreign experts bought time for the CSI to develop its own staff. From 1981, officers who rose up the CSI ranks and were groomed by the Institute, such as John Ewing-Chow and Teo Hee Lian, began taking over leadership positions, including as director of the CSI. Gradually, the CSI was able to fill up its staffing establishment, providing it the capacity to improve its inventory of courses over the years. By the early 1990s, the CSI had doubled its total number of courses from its initial years as the CSSDI, and reaching out to more public officers across the various hierarchical strata of the bureaucracy. The CSI’s role in leading the productivity and computerisation drives across the Public Service was an acknowledgement of the CSI’s maturing capacity by the leadership of the Public Service. The most credible recognition of the CSI’s
institutionalisation was the political leadership’s deployment of the CSI as a foreign policy instrument in strengthening bilateral relations with Malaysia.

The CSI’s institutionalisation also manifested through the rising level of confidence among its leadership team, the emergence of particular organisational interests and the identification with these interests by its staff. The decision by the CSI leadership to engage permanent secretaries on the Institute’s difficulties, especially before the gaze of the mass media, was particularly bold and pronounced. But, even away from the public domain, John Ewing-Chow and Teo Hee Lian were also active in pursuing the interests of the CSI during their respective tenures as directors. Ewing-Chow, when he was director, strove to uplift the image of the CSI as a school for training the whole Public Service. Teo in turn represented the sentiments of the staff in holding onto – metaphorically but also literally – the CSI’s ground as the central training school of the bureaucracy. Thus, the forging of such close identification among the staff with the organisation and its peculiar interests, together with its capacity to train large sections of the bureaucracy, pointed to the CSI’s development into a recognised institution of training in the Singapore Public Service.

The dilemmas and tensions faced by the CSI, and the bureaucracy, should not be understated. Like civil services of other countries, the Singapore Public Service also faced quandaries associated with training. Seeking the optimal balance between on-the-job training and formal training appeared to be sorted out with the setting up of the STI, and was definitely resolved by investing in modern facilities for CSSDI. The debate between an academic-oriented curriculum and a practitioner-based approach did not appear to be an issue from the start. Although academics enlisted in starting up STI continued into the transition to CSSDI, their contracts were short-term from the beginning and the curriculum they helped to draw up bent towards applied – rather than theoretical – training.

The real tension for the CSI, as well as the bureaucracy, was between broad-based training and élite development. On the formal organisational level, the Public Service appeared to aspire towards training up the whole bureaucracy. This goal was repeatedly stressed by the Minister for Finance during the STI period described in Chapter 4. Indeed, broad-based training seemed to be the raison d’être for the establishment of the CSSDI and the CSI, i.e., “The objective of the Institute is to enhance the effectiveness of the public sector”. The team of civil servants managing the CSI certainly took this formal organisational goal seriously. During their respective terms as directors, John Ewing-Chow, Teo Hee Lian and David Ma led the CSI to

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improve the training programmes for the rank-and-file of the bureaucracy, without diverting attention away from developing the leadership corps. As the overall inventory of programmes grew, so did the number of courses for the élite, allowing leadership development to consistently constitute half of the CSI’s total course offerings. The permanent secretaries and chief executives who collectively formed the leadership of the Public Service seemed to support this goal of training the whole bureaucracy, at least at the formal organisational level.

Informally, the leadership of the Public Service evidently rooted for an emphasis on developing the Administrative Service élite. In all purposes, these permanent secretaries and chief executives heading government agencies could be reflecting the position of the political leadership. The decision by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Finance Minister Goh Keng Swee, immediately after self-government, to concentrate on cultivating a corps of Administrative Service leadership élite – a Praetorian Guards – did not appear to have changed over the years. The fact that these permanent secretaries and chief executives were predominantly AOs themselves should not be overlooked, even though not all of them would be driven by provincial outlooks. To be sure, many among these senior officers would have been very conscious of their responsibilities over their respective ministries and agencies, as well as their responsibilities over the whole Public Service, and even the Singapore state. Many of these Public Service leaders were involved in leading the bureaucracy in steering Singapore through the phases of state-formation and developmental state. In the eyes of some of these Public Service leaders, the best interests of the bureaucracy and the state was to focus on grooming scarce talents and to sustain and expand the training of the AOs. While not all of them might be completely like-minded, the prevailing consensus by the 1980s was to raise a dedicated centre for developing the AO leadership, and which should be set apart from the CSI. Thus, while at the formal organisational level, the Public Service leadership supported the CSI’s drive towards broad-based training, at the informal level, that endorsement was conditioned upon continued and sustained heavy emphasis on developing the AO leadership élite.

Ironically, the CSI’s development into an institution of broad-based training, seemingly fulfilling its mission in the eyes of its staff, highlighted the CSI’s lack of capacity in leadership development from the perspectives of the Public Service leadership. The possibility of positioning the issue as flourishing the CSI as a centre of functional training on the one hand, and plugging a gap in leadership development on the other hand, was lost with the awkward handling of the CSI amidst the reorganisation. The interest of the Public Service leadership, and the government towards cultivating the AOs was demonstrated by the rush to set up the new Civil
Service College. From the viewpoints of those in CSI, this was a marginalisation – a literal displacement with the mandatory move away from Heng Mui Keng Terrace – of the CSI. CSI’s tenure as the sole central civil service training organisation finally came to an end with its renaming and subordination as a department under the banner of the Civil Service College in 1996.

Leadership development in the new Civil Service College is discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 8
The First Dedicated Leadership Training Initiative: Civil Service College

In 1993, the Civil Service College was set up as a point to improve policy-making and leadership development in the Singapore Public Service. By locating the context against which the CSC was established, this chapter begins by highlighting the significance of the College: not only did CSC realise the bureaucracy’s long search for a credible leadership development scheme, strong political impetus drove – indeed provided the *raison d’être* for – the establishment of the Civil Service College.

The chapter proceeds then to highlight the importance of personnel selection in setting up the bureaucracy’s latest training initiative. Selecting leaders with the vision and competence not only helped to overcome potential resistance against the CSC venture, it allowed the College subsequently to produce remarkable programmes. The CSC’s milestone programmes were by far its most notable accomplishment as they offered, for the first time, a comprehensive set of leadership development programmes for the bureaucracy’s Administrative Service and upper leadership echelon. More significantly, an in-depth examination of the CSC’s staffing and activities also reveals the high level of political attention accorded to the institution. This high level of support from the political leadership made possible the creation of the CSC as the point through which reforms were introduced into the leadership echelon of the Singapore Public Service.

8.1 The Bureaucratic Imperative

The first public inkling of the pending establishment of the Civil Service College came from a planted ‘leak’ in the national broadsheet. On 24 May 1991, the *Straits Times* quoted a “well-placed civil service source” revealing that a new institution for training Administrative Service officers was in the works: “we have gone past the study stage and some plans have already been drawn up.”¹

Leadership training had always featured prominently in the Singapore Public Service, as described in the preceding chapters. The *raison d’être* of the Political Study Centre, set up in 1959 when Singapore became a self-governing state, targeted the leadership of the bureaucracy, to socialise them to the tasks of state-formation. Equipping officers of the Administrative Service leadership cadre with the requisite management skills to lead the developmental state was the motivation for creating the Staff Training Institute in 1971. Throughout the 1980s, leadership development

¹ ST 24 May 1991: 30.
continued to preoccupy the Public Service’s leadership when contemplating the subject of training. And, as described in the previous chapter, their dissatisfaction with leadership training efforts in the Civil Service Institute led to the decision for setting up the Civil Service College. Kishore Mahbubani, then Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reflected the sentiments of his colleagues and permanent secretaries who constituted the leadership of the Public Service:

I think the Civil Service Institute was always to provide skills-based training; more for lower level officials; teach them various skills they needed to know to do their jobs. Whereas Civil Service College was always intended for the highest levels of the Service, for the AOs, for the high flyers, to train them, develop them, socialise them.²

In 1992, Richard Hu, the Minister for Finance, formally announced plans to set up the Civil Service College. He observed that, “the Civil Service presently lacks an institutional focal point where tradition is preserved and values shared and transmitted through generations.”³ Singapore, hence, needed an equivalent of France’s Ecole Nationale d’Administration or Malaysia’s National Institute of Public Administration where public officers could be imbued with common values and traditions.

On 29 Apr 1993, the Civil Service College was inaugurated, its official mission:

To foster the development of a strong and vibrant senior Civil Service which will, in addition to the prevailing strengths of competence, dedication, integrity and meritocracy, have a strong sense of tradition, esprit de corps, enhanced managerial skills, a sensitive understanding of the new evolving political and economic realities (domestic, regional and global) and commitment to a long term vision of a secure, stable and successful Singapore.⁴

A key reason for setting up the CSC was to forge a stronger esprit de corps among the Administrative Service officers.⁵ These AOs, who formed the leadership of the Singapore Public Service and whose role in policy-making was secondary only to the political leadership, had long been heading various government agencies across the bureaucracy. By the early 1990s, the Public Service had evolved from the traditional ministries to include 62 statutory boards; public officers – especially AOs – were also deployed to many government-linked corporations.⁶ Kishore Mahbubani, who was appointed the first Dean of the CSC, felt this diversification had led to too much

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Table 8.1 Manpower Strength of the Administrative Service, 1974 - 1996

Table 8.2 HR Structure of the Administrative Service, circa 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Corresponding Rank</th>
<th>Monthly Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>AA / SAA</td>
<td>$2,715 - $3,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>AA / SAA</td>
<td>$4,065 - $4,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Secretary</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>$5,090 - $6,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Assistant Secretary</td>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>$6,980 - $8,155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Corresponding Rank</th>
<th>Monthly Salary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superscale G</td>
<td>Deputy Secretary</td>
<td>$10,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale F</td>
<td></td>
<td>$11,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale E</td>
<td>Deputy Secretary / Higher Deputy Secretary</td>
<td>$12,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale E1</td>
<td></td>
<td>$13,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale D</td>
<td>Higher Deputy Secretary / Senior Deputy Secretary</td>
<td>$14,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale D1</td>
<td></td>
<td>$17,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale C</td>
<td>Senior DS / Permanent Secretary</td>
<td>$20,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale B</td>
<td>Permanent Secretary</td>
<td>$24,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscale A</td>
<td>Permanent Secretary / Senior PS</td>
<td>$28,335</td>
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<td>Staff Grade I</td>
<td>Senior PS / Special PS</td>
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<td>Staff Grade II</td>
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<td>Staff Grade IV</td>
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<td>$54,220</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff Grade V</td>
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<td>$63,690</td>
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</table>

* ‘Timescale’ refers to the general scheme of service.

7 Personnel Development Branch, Public Service Division, Prime Minister’s Office, in Anthony Tan (1997) 23.
‘fragmentation’ of the Public Service. The leadership cadre needed to come together as a strong team. In fact, political scientist Seah Chee Meow observed in the mid-1980s that “the bonds among the civil servants are not strong [and the] external respectability enjoyed by the civil service is not matched by strong intra-organisational cohesion.”

Peter Ong, who was appointed the College’s Deputy Dean, elaborated in an interview years later:

getting a group of folks... the PWD [Public Works Department] engineer, the SAF [Singapore Armed Forces] pilot, the Admin Officer, to come together, to have a collective instinct of what it will take for Singapore to survive and to grow to the next stage. We didn’t have that; we had functional training – write good English, leadership management training, supervisory skills. But not quite, we didn’t use ‘whole-of-government’ then, not quite getting the whole group of leaders together. So, a sense that the senior people in the system would progress through the system together, knowing each other, and having the collective instincts of what make this place tick and what would be needed to make this place continue to grow and develop into the next phase.

Another rationale for establishing CSC was to create a focal point for the élan of the Singapore Public Service. As early as 1975, Seah had warned that

the bureaucratic ethos (such as pride in serving in the bureaucracy) is not effectively instilled among the bureaucrats who tend to be more susceptible to purely monetary considerations... due to the fact that many of the bureaucrats (especially those in the senior or division one grade) have not been in the bureaucracy for a long time. They have yet to internalise many of the norms of the bureaucracy.

As the Public Service entered into the 1990s, the imminent retirement of a whole generation of officers raised the need to preserve the traditions and values which had emerged from and defined the Public Service.

To George Yeo, then-Minister of State for Finance, the bureaucracy needed,

a tradition and a spirit. We needed institutional memory, myths and heroes. This was how the idea of CSC came about. .... I never had formal responsibility for CSC ... but always took a close interest in them. At that time, I was probably the minister most convinced of the need for the CSC.

CSC would cultivate three characteristics Yeo thought were essential for the Public Service’s leadership: intellectual leadership, moral leadership and an awareness of its role in society.

9 Kishore Mahbubani, Dean, CSC, to Col (Res) Ho Meng Kit, PPS to SM, “Civil Service College (CSC),” 6 Feb 1993, CSC Records
13 George Yeo, Minister of State for Finance & Foreign Affairs, 1988, email correspondence with Author, 21 Jun 2012.
Continuing to recruit from among the best and brightest would ensure that AOs could command intellectual leadership. But to George Yeo:

That leadership is not only intellectual, it must also be moral. That is the second condition for a successful civil service. The moral basis of the civil service of the Roman Church is the Christian Bible. The moral basis of the Chinese mandarinate was and may well again be Confucianism. In Singapore, the moral basis of the Civil Service is gradually taking shape. Some aspects are clear like intolerance of corruption and commitment to national independence, but others are not. Our national values, when they are settled, must eventually be reflected in the way the Civil Service carries itself. Moral leadership must not only be exercised, it must be publicly and visibly exercised. We cannot succumb to the free-wheeling ways of the private sector. The free market idealised by Adam Smith works only when competition takes place within a moral framework that engenders regard for law and respect for human life and dignity. That moral framework the Civil Service helps to provide. The Civil Service has to be above the fray of the marketplace. 14

Finally, AOs needed a “collective self-consciousness of its role in society and of its corporate mission. …. As a group, civil servants must always be concerned with the national welfare and proud to be charged with that responsibility.” 15

The CSC’s chief advocate was thus envisioning CSC as a transmitter of, what was essentially, the élan of the Singapore Public Service. Through telling and re-telling of ‘war-tales’ and even the perpetuation of ‘myths’ and ‘heroes’, this ‘moral leadership’ could be cultivated among new recruits and young officers of the Administrative Service.

8.2 A New Political Context: Socialisation Revisited

Evidently, the Civil Service College was also meant to develop political acumen among the leadership corps of the Public Service, implicit in George Yeo’s vision of Administrative Service officers filled with a ‘collective self-consciousness of its role in society’.

The political context was instrumental in the CSC’s formation. The 1980s witnessed a dip in the electoral fortunes of the ruling People’s Action Party. Following the concession of its long-standing absolute monopoly over the Parliament, after losing a by-election in 1981, the PAP lost another Parliamentary seat in the 1984 General Elections; its share of popular votes fell by 12.6% to 62.9%. 16 The PAP’s relatively dismal performance was attributed to the electorate’s resentment with the recent slew of unpopular measures and, in connection with that, a greater desire by citizens,

14 “Opening address by George Yong-Boon Yeo, Minister of State for Finance and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, at MSD’s Seminar ‘Business management practices for a better public service’,” 2 Dec 1988.
15 Ibid.
16 SAR 1985: 66.
increasingly affluent and well-educated, to be consulted in policy-making. In the aftermath, the government responded with various initiatives to solicit feedback from the public; public communications training for civil servants intensified, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The 1988 polls again saw the PAP’s vote-share dipping to 61.8% although the party clawed back one Parliamentary seat.

When Goh Chok Tong succeeded Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister in 1990, Goh premised his tenure upon an “open and consultative style of government”. The population appeared to be drawn to his affable personality and gentler style; with the economy buoyant, Goh decided to seek the electorate’s endorsement by calling for early polls. In the 1991 General Elections, the PAP – while returned to power – witnessed its worst ever electoral outing: the loss of four Parliamentary seats and an all-time low of 61% of the popular vote. This might have been a decisive win in other democracies but the PAP had until the 1980s monopolised all the seats in Parliaments and its vote-share never dropped below 70%.

8.2.1 Development to Democratisation?

At around this time, a growing discourse in political economy on development’s causality relationship towards democratisation began to turn its lens on Singapore. The theory that economic development, by raising educational levels and social mobility, would raise a middle class seeking greater role in politics was not new and could be traced to Marx and Weber. The spate of political liberalisation in Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs) in the 1980s, from Taiwan and Korea to Thailand and the Philippines, renewed interest in the development-democratisation thesis. The influential roles played by the middle-class in the democratisation of these countries, middle-class rising from state-led economic development across these NICs in the 1960s and 1970s, a la Chalmers Johnson’s developmental state, appeared to lend credence to the

18 Quah (1989) thought that the results were a PAP victory but Mauzy and Milne, pointed out continued unhappiness among the electorate to explain the PAP’s continued slide at the polls. Mauzy and Milne 150. See also Yap, Lim and Leong 446.
postulation. More significantly, the seeming validation of this theory heralded questions on whether similar democratisation would emerge in other Southeast Asian NICs or near-NICs like Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.\textsuperscript{23}

For Singapore, the PAP’s electoral dips from the 1980s into 1991 against the background of an increasingly educated and affluent population appeared to signal a similar trend towards development-induced democratisation. Scholars even with the benefit of a few years of hindsight in the later-1990s were more circumspect whether Singapore would go the way of Taiwan, Korea or Thailand.\textsuperscript{24} However, for the PAP leadership in the aftermath of its debacle at the 1991 General Elections, the party’s future might not have appeared certain. What was apparent amidst the intense soul-searching that followed was the need to respond to the changing political milieu.\textsuperscript{25}

Among some of the PAP’s more public post-electoral reflections, which given the party’s introspective nature were clearly directed at an external audience, were some references to the Public Service. In an address to PAP activists, the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM), Ong Teng Cheong, admitted that some policies had hurt the poor and alienated Chinese-educated sections of the population.\textsuperscript{26} But, Ong wondered aloud: why was there this perception gap between how the people and the government view official policies? While urging party activists to attune themselves to the sentiments among the population, DPM Ong in the same breath called on civil servants to be “politically astute”:

Sometimes, even the most well-meaning policy can end up a disaster if the Government bureaucracy shows no political sensitivity in implementing it. … there is sometimes room for accommodating people adversely affected by our policies. In such cases, there is no need for the bureaucracy to take the clinical view that no exceptions can be made. Government is about people, and rules are made by people.\textsuperscript{27}

To the Deputy Prime Minister, younger officers who have risen to important positions across government agencies might not wield the political acumen of older civil servants:

When the PAP took office in 1959, one of the first things it did was to set up the Political Study Centre… to get senior civil servants… aware of the changed political environment. Perhaps the proposed Civil Service College is a good


\textsuperscript{24} Writing in 1993, Rodan in “The growth of Singapore’s middle class and its political significance” argued that while “there is a degree of middle class alienation from the PAP”, the government had sufficiently co-opted the middle class to forestall any threat to the PAP. Later in 1997, Heng argued that the PAP changed to a more consultative governing style and “use … the party’s considerable experience and power to pre-empt, co-opt or curb dissidence so that they do not undermine the fundamentals of a dominant party system.” See Heng Hiang Khng, “Economic Development and Political Change: The Democratisation Process in Singapore,” \textit{Democratisation in Southeast and East Asia}, ed. Anek (1997) 135.


\textsuperscript{26} Yap, Lim and Leong (2009) 461-463; Singh (1992) 119-125.

\textsuperscript{27} Ong Teng Cheong (1992) 18.
place for the government to inculcate greater political sensitivity amongst younger civil servants.\textsuperscript{28}

Lest this be taken as making a scape-goat of the bureaucracy for the ruling party’s electoral woes, there was evidence that the political leadership had already, prior to the polls, detected a need for to sharpen the political sensitivity of civil servants. About two months before the 31 Aug 1991 general elections, the Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, exhorted Administrative Service officers, the leadership echelons of the Public Service:

Administrative Officers should have political sensitivity. An understanding of the history of our young nation, and how it has influenced the attitudes and perceptions of the various communities in the population, is necessary. So too is the need to know the thinking and value system of the political leadership and electorate.\textsuperscript{29}

The reference to the Political Study Centre draws comparison with the political milieu following self-government: new political élite consolidating their authority amidst a bureaucracy disconnected with the population. PAP leaders recognised the critical role played by civil servants in delivering public services and thus contributing towards their electoral legitimacy. Like their predecessors three decades earlier, the PAP leaders in the early 1990s turned to the ‘political education’ of the Administrative Service leadership echelon of the Public Service, its ‘Praetorian Guards’.\textsuperscript{30} This inculcation of ‘greater political sensitivity’ among the AOs was evidently a role envisioned for the Civil Service College.

8.3 Getting the Right People: Personnel Selection and Organisational Structure

The first task in setting up the CSC was selecting the key personnel. The position of Dean of CSC was deliberated at the highest political level, Kishore Mahbubani disclosed:

I was Deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs when they made me Dean of the Civil Service College. The man who approached me and asked me to become the Dean was George Yeo, who was then 2nd Minister of Foreign Affairs..... I wasn’t privy to all the thinking that went into it; it was all decided at the Cabinet level.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ngiam, Interview with Author, 10 Jan 2013.
\textsuperscript{31} Mahbubani, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012. Emphasis mine.
When conferred the discretion to select his deputy, Mahbubani – conscious of the need to divide his time between CSC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he continued concurrently as Deputy Secretary – made sure that CSC had an effective leader at the working level. He specifically requested for Peter Ong as his deputy:

The Deputy Secretary in PSD [Public Service Division] at that time was Tan Boon Huat. Tan Boon Huat gave me two choices, either somebody else or Peter Ong. But he said, ‘Peter Ong you have to wait six months.’ I said, ‘Peter Ong is very good, I’ll wait six months.’ So once Peter Ong came on board full time, then I just left it to him. I worked with him before, in APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] meetings, I knew how good he was, and so I was very happy to get him back. Because I knew if you have somebody good, you just leave it to them to do it.\(^{32}\)

Ong, pursuing his Master in Business Administration degree at Stanford University in 1992, revealed another consideration in his selection: “Kishore called me: ‘Would you want to work in CSC?’ Because they wanted someone who was familiar with case studies, being business schools we did case studies. So they thought I could contribute in terms of case studies.”\(^{33}\)

The depth of thinking that went into selecting the appropriate staff at the CSC was further illustrated in the Assistant Dean appointment. Miss Patricia Lam, a young Administrative Service officer, recognised that – while she was left to define the parameters of her role – it was an opportunity for her own development:

As I was a fresh graduate it was mainly a training post for me and I was very aware that I had no more experience than any of the MDOs [Management Development Officers, working-level staff]. … It was also a very flat organisation so we all did whatever was necessary. I did everything from moving chairs and planning an office move; to writing speeches and later to filling in for Peter as far as I could. As time passed and things became busier, I took on more of the management – interviewing applicants, some staff performance appraisals, ministry-level meetings – and as much of day-to-day stuff as I could so that things didn’t have to go to Peter.\(^{34}\)

The CSC was deliberately set up as a small organisation, having three Administrative Service officers managing a handful of working level staff (see Table 8.3). The choice of only three AOs, and a combination of a senior, intermediate and subaltern, overcame the concerns that stalled the Administrative Staff College proposal in the 1980s: the detachment of four to six AOs from operational positions were at that time deemed too high an opportunity cost for that leadership development venture. Intended as a platform for the transmission of values and political instincts, CSC was

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\(^{32}\) Ibid. Peter Ong will eventually rise to become the Head of Civil Service in 2010.

\(^{33}\) Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012.

\(^{34}\) Patricia Lam, Assistant Dean, CSC, 1994 -1995, email correspondence with author, 27 Mar 2013.
also envisioned to draw on senior public officers rather than rely on a large full-time faculty.  

### Table 8.3: Civil Service College, 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Kishore Mahbubani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Dean</td>
<td>Peter Ong Boon Kwee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Dean</td>
<td>Ms Patricia Lam Yin May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 3 Management Development Officers
- 1 Executive Officer

The CSC was set up within the Ministry of Finance’s Public Service Division, the personnel management agency of the bureaucracy (see Table 8.4). This reporting line paralleled that of the Civil Service Institute, indicating that training continued to be seen as a subject of human resource management by the government. Originally, an option was to site the CSC as a centre within the CSI, to draw on existing resources, but the final decision was to establish CSC as a separate institution. Like CSI, CSC was funded by the PSD’s budget and did not charge participants or their ministries for the courses they attended.

Plans for the CSC also included a Board of Governors to advise the College’s executive team. It was mooted by the Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, revealing the very high level of political attention paid to the CSC. Like earlier counterparts, this board was chaired by the Head of Civil Service, but the CSC board for the first time had representation from private corporations, the media and academia besides permanent secretaries and senior civil servants. There was no additional information to either assess the effects of this Board of Governors upon the CSC or compare it with earlier predecessors.

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38 Kishore Mahbubani, Dean, CSC, to Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Executive Chairman, IEAPE, 3 Feb 1992, CSC Records
Table 8.4: Civil Service College within the Singapore Government, 1993 - 1994

In all, the Civil Service College’s personnel selection and organisational structure indicated high level political commitment and long term planning for the bureaucracy. In particular, with the Administrative Service officers so highly prized for their operational roles, appointing three AOs to head the CSC represented a deep determination to invest in the strategic development of the AO leadership cadre and the broader Singapore Public Service.

8.4 Overseas Exemplars

Forming the Civil Service College represented the furthest Singapore had gone in studying foreign exemplars. In the 1980s, an Administrative Staff College proposal led to studies of various European training institutions. Nothing emerged from these studies, not due to shortcomings of these foreign models but an unwillingness to forego Administrative Service officers from operational posts to form the faculty for the proposed institution.

In drawing up the Civil Service College, well-known centres of leadership training were thoroughly studied but the main consideration was adaptability to the local context.\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{Ecole Nationale d'Administration}, \textsc{Mahbubani} pointed out for example, while held up as the yardstick for bureaucratic training was not practicable in Singapore’s circumstances: "\textit{ENA} is very critical, because the ranking in the class determines which service you go to…. \textit{ENA} basically was a very powerful institution that determines the career. We were not that powerful, we can’t get people for two years."\textsuperscript{42} Deputy Dean, Peter Ong, added: "I don’t think it’s possible for any senior or high potential officers to be spared three years. If they could be, they cannot be very needed in their workplace."\textsuperscript{43} Whether or not they were privy to complications forestalling earlier proposals, CSC’s planners avoided the lengthy secondment of AOs as permanent faculty. \textsc{Mahbubani} said:

I did visit some institutions, British and so on. But we knew our circumstances, we were small. If you want to have a big institution, you are going to have throughput. Our Administrative Service was only 250, so Civil Service College can’t do that much. And we didn’t want to have full time faculty, we relied on either current leaders or retired leaders.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} A study team that included Tan Boon Huat, Deputy Secretary, PSD, and Teo Hee Lian, Director, CSI, visited some notable leadership training institutions in Europe, including \textit{ENA}. Lai (1995) 33.
\textsuperscript{42} \textsc{Mahbubani}, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012. Also \textsc{Mahbubani} to Goh, 3 Feb 1992.
\textsuperscript{43} Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012.
\textsuperscript{44} \textsc{Mahbubani}, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012.
The source of inspiration for the CSC was to be North America. Peter Ong was amidst his post-graduate studies at Stanford University in 1992, when he was directed to visit various leadership training institutions in the United States and Canada. He was most impressed by the Canadian Centre for Management Development, convinced that “you need to put leaders across whole-of-government together at various milestones of their lives.”

8.5 Political Support: Overcoming Doubters

The Civil Service College proposal was not without complications and the project soon encountered a doubter, and an influential one at that. Dr. Goh Keng Swee, retired Deputy Prime Minister, had upon learning of the CSC proposal expressed concern with the cost of building the CSC complex. Goh, the long-time Finance Minister known for his frugality, also had reservations over CSC’s ability to match the ENA in turning Administrative Service officers into French énarques. Although retired for a decade, Goh continued to be highly respected within the political circle and the bureaucracy. He was instrumental in re-organising the post-colonial Public Service, devising the strategies that led to Singapore’s economic development and setting up the Singapore Armed Forces. For 11 of his 25 years in government, he was Deputy Prime Minister. Fortunately, Goh raised his objections over CSC in private, though this he did with Lee Kuan Yew. While he had relinquished the Prime Minister post to Goh Chok Tong, Lee remained as Senior Minister in the Cabinet and ranked second only to the premier in government protocol. Mahbubani, as Dean of CSC, quickly found himself fielding high-level queries – and doubts – over the CSC.

The CSC was fortuitous to enjoy some political support. Mahbubani was able to seek advice from George Yeo, by then Minister for Information and the Arts and concurrently Second Minister for Foreign Affairs, a consistently strong proponent of CSC in the Cabinet. More importantly, the CSC had the support of the Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong. His endorsement of Mahbubani’s responses to various objections – the CSC complex was to be shared with other institutions and hence the costs were reasonable, and CSC was not seeking to replicate ENA – helped to assure Dr. Goh Keng Swee. Mahbubani, recounting this episode, credited then-DPM Lee Hsien Loong for saving CSC from stillbirth:

45 Ibid.
46 Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012.
47 Gok Keng Swee, to Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Dean, CSC, 23 Dec 1992, CSC Records; Mahbubani, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012.
48 Yeo, email correspondence with Author, 21 Jun 2012.
49 Ibid.
[DPM Lee’s] support was absolutely critical. His support was critical in terms of making sure that Dr Goh’s opposition did not derail the whole process. In fact, the critical thing he did was that he called me in for a meeting. We had a conversation; most of it was what he was telling me. And then the notes of conversation were circulated to all the Permanent Secretaries …send a signal to all the Permanent Secretaries that the Singapore Government and he were strongly supporting the Civil Service College project. And that was how I got very strong support.50

8.6 Training Programmes and Activities

Conceptualised as a dedicated leadership development centre, the Civil Service College was able to concentrate its activities on developing the élite Administrative Service officers. Unlike earlier training initiatives, it did not have to put up with the inhibitions and distractions of attending to the other demands of the broader bureaucracy. The outcome of its focus on leadership development was a syllabus CSC termed ‘milestone programmes’.

8.6.1 Milestone Programmes

Milestone programmes were designed as training interventions scheduled at various ‘critical points’, or milestones, in the careers of senior public officers. In the schema developed by the CSC, three milestone programmes would provide the relevant training for Administrative Service officers and other public officers with leadership potential at different phases of their careers: the Foundation Course to induct new AOs, the Senior Management Programme for mid-career heads of departments, and the Leadership in Administration Programme for senior officers rising to the apex of the Public Service hierarchy.

The Foundation Course, or FC, was developed by the Staff Training Institute in the 1970s. It aimed to induct scholars who recently returned from overseas – typically prestigious American and British – universities into their junior Administrative Service posts. FC’s curricula had remained similar as STI evolved into the CSSDI and finally the Civil Service Institute, a remarkable accomplishment considering that the leadership of the Public Service constantly deliberated over the training of AOs. In fact, it was their dissatisfaction with the CSI’s leadership training offerings that led to the decision to set up the CSC.

The Foundation Course, thus transferred to CSC, continued to induct new AOs to the machinery of government, management and communication skills, and a tour of

50 Mahbubani, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012.
the ASEAN capital cities.\textsuperscript{51} But in revamping the FC, Patricia Lam, recalled that teaching methodologies in graduate business schools served as reference: “A bigger influence on the design of the courses was the MBA approach – it was meant to be intense, cohort-building, mix hard and soft skills, and include leadership training.”\textsuperscript{52}

The Senior Management Programme (SMP) was a CSC invention, directed at talented public officers “between 30 and 40 years old and who are typically heading Departments or Divisions in their Ministries.”\textsuperscript{53} The resultant five-week SMP put participants through panel discussions, case studies and meetings with senior civil servants and ministers, with the curriculum focusing on principles of policy making in Singapore. The incorporation of adventure learning activities sought to foster \textit{esprit de corps} among the participants. A final test dispatched participants acting as consultants to various ministries, to study potential problems and offer recommendations, exposing them to “the difficulties of reconciling policy formulation with operational and logistical considerations.”\textsuperscript{54} Capping each SMP was a study trip aimed at raising participants’ awareness of regional issues. A CSC official pointed out that attending SMP did not guarantee participants promotion but prepared them for the eventuality, should they be promoted, for working at the next higher grade.\textsuperscript{55}

At the apex of CSC’s pyramid of milestone programmes was the Leaders in Administration Programme (LAP) for “officers identified as having the potential for very senior positions in the public sector.”\textsuperscript{56} The 15 participants in the 1995 pilot run consisted of Deputy Secretaries, chief executives of statutory boards and top uniformed service commanders. Beside meetings with permanent secretaries and ministers, discussions among participants probed them to evaluate the principles of policy-making as Singapore developed. Like FC and SMP, a key aim in LAP was to forge cohesion among the participants. Initial feedback from participants appeared to reward CSC and its staff for their efforts: in particular, participants found “experiential learning and sharing of ideas in group discussions are useful learning tools.”\textsuperscript{57}

While the three sets of milestone programmes appeared neatly pegged to various optimal intervening career points of Administrative Service officers, drawing these up were not without their difficulties. Miss Lim Soo Hoon, who succeeded Peter Ong as Deputy Dean in 1995, pointed out that CSC’s small and recent set-up could

\textsuperscript{52}Lam, email correspondence with author, 27 Mar 2013.
\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Ibid} 12.
have limited their capacity in designing an appropriate curriculum: “[the officers] were all very green, first time working in the Civil Service. And here they were supposed to come out with the curriculum.”\textsuperscript{58} CSC staff held discussions with officials in charge of personnel policies at the Public Service Division and prospective participants; they studied several foreign leadership training programmes for applicable lessons.\textsuperscript{59} Their readiness to experiment, in the opinion of Lim Soo Hoon, and some beginner’s luck helped CSC pulled off the whole suite of milestone programmes:

the good fortune for us was that we used basically the same template. Because it was so new, nobody had ever gone through any of these programmes. So whatever we gave, let’s say LAP, we could replicate and deepen it a bit more or increase the level of people coming to talk to you a bit more. Because none of the participants in LAP had ever been through SMP. So we were able to do that for a few cycles, before people started saying, ‘Hang on, the people who are going to LAP are the people who went through SMP, and therefore you cannot replicate.’\textsuperscript{60}

Another difficulty was attendance. While the Public Service Division had the power to send officers for milestone programmes, the task of ensuring officers’ physical attendance fell onto CSC staff.\textsuperscript{61} This was an awkward challenge, considering that most participants outranked CSC officers. Dean Mahbubani recounted:

a perpetual challenge in Singapore, is that most senior civil servants think training is a waste of time, so they were very reluctant to come for the courses. And even when they came they would be focused always on their day jobs, and never fully properly immersed into training.\textsuperscript{62}

Deputy Dean, Peter Ong, added:

I remember it was very difficult, one of the key challenges, early challenges, was how to get the SAF to cough up their Chief of Defence Force, or Service Chiefs to come for LAP. How to cough up DSes [Deputy Secretaries], Perm Secs, and Managing Directors of Statutory Boards to come? …it would not have been possible if DPM Lee [Hsien Loong] at that time did not personally play a very instrumental role.\textsuperscript{63}

In a meeting involving senior civil servants, the Deputy Prime Minister urged supervisors to recognise the importance of training in the career development of their staff; the returns for giving up a key lieutenant for training would inevitably be

\textsuperscript{58} Lim Soo Hoon, Deputy Dean, CSC, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
\textsuperscript{59} Foreign leadership programmes studies included Hong Kong’s Senior Staff Course, the Federal Executive Institute’s Leadership for Democratic Society programme, and the CCMD’s Career Advancement Programme. “Civil Service College’s Senior Management Programme,” Ethos Second Quarter (1994): 7.
\textsuperscript{60} Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
\textsuperscript{61} Lai (1995) 36.
\textsuperscript{62} Mahbubani, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012.
\textsuperscript{63} Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012. Also Lai (1995) 36.
rewarding. Without the offer by DPM Lee – and other ministers – to meet with participants, securing the attendance of senior officers at the milestone programmes, in Ong’s opinion, “would not be possible.”

All milestone programmes underwent rigorous internal reviews. Participants were expected to complete evaluation forms, which were customised to every course and “elaborate in order to assess their satisfaction with the courses and if refinements are in order.” Their feedback were summarised for submission to the Dean, before final reports were presented to the Public Service Division. These internal reviews are, however, not available currently. In lieu of such internal records, participants’ feedback in Ethos, the CSC’s newsletter, provided a sampling of their reception towards these milestone programmes: “the best civil service course I have ever attended, both in terms of learning and the camaraderie built up in the five weeks.”

8.6.2 Case Study as Modus Operandi

One of the decisions taken in conceptualising CSC was to adopt the case study method. Peter Ong explained that, “we didn’t want to go back to the Political Study Centre. We didn’t want it to be propaganda. And that’s why we use the case study.” To inculcate élan and political instincts among highly-educated and intellectually sharp Administrative Service officers, the didactic style of learning would be counter-productive. In comparison,

Case study allows you to come to your own conclusions about what should have been done, what could have been done, and evaluate what was done against your own views…. We did that by giving all the raw data that led the policy makers at that time to come to their conclusions. And you use the same source document and decide whether policy makers did the right thing. That is the power of case study.

In the academic-field of adult learning or andragogy in Singapore at that time, the case study method was very new. Existing case studies were either business-management types or on foreign public policies. Yet for the Singaporean Administrative Service officers to be able to engage in realistic discussion and take away real lessons, case studies on public policies in Singapore needed to be drawn up. There were

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64 “Key points of speech by DPM BG (Res) Lee Hsien Loong at lunch hosted by DPM and Minister for Finance for prospective members of the Civil Service College’s Board of Governors,” 14 Oct 1993, CSC Records.
65 Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012.
66 CSC staff quoted in Lai 41. Also p. 55.
68 Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012.
69 Ibid.
obviously no lack of material to write up case studies on policy-making in Singapore but, planners for the CSC recognised, the challenge lay in selecting issues suitable for discussion. The guidelines that emerged from discussions on the matter directed topics to cover dilemmas of policy-making where no final answers were readily apparent. Case studies would aim to point out that policy-making was a continuous process, where policy-issues evolve over time, and that even the best policies needed to be reviewed constantly in the light of changing circumstances. Another objective these case studies would seek to highlight was the importance of the political context in policy-making, and that economically efficient policies needed to be packaged in politically acceptable ways in order to resonate and track with the citizenry.

Having decided on writing up case studies based on actual Singapore policy-making, the next challenge was identifying case writers. With the CSC designed as a small set-up, it simply did not have the capacity to write up case studies. At the same time, CSC planners thought that government agencies would be in the best position to write up case studies of topics within their jurisdictional portfolio; being domain owners these agencies would be familiar with the considerations and constraints of the policies being addressed. However, coaxing government agencies to deviate from their regular writing style advocating specific policy position was a struggle, as Peter Ong recounted:

It took a long time just convincing ministries how to write case study, keep it open-ended. Because if I’m Ministry of Communications, MinComms, I want to write the COE [Certificate of Entitlement] case study convincing you why COE was the right way. … it was not easy to tell them: ‘No, no, no, that’s not how.’ And we needed MinComms to write the case study, we needed MinComms to provide a lot of data. … MinComms would not want to write it this way; they will want to write why COE was the best thing. So we have to convince them. And that was not easy.

Lim Soo Hoon remembered that the ministries needed ‘persuasion’ from then-Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong: “he called all the Perm Secs to a meeting, because we had complaints that ministries were not willing to step up to do case studies for us, he actually chaired a meeting to tell people to do these case studies.” Eventually, the case studies CSC obtained from government agencies included those on the Certificate of Entitlement, a policy regulating vehicular congestion by requiring prospective owners to bid for eligibility, and the policy-dilemmas of healthcare financing and streaming students according to academic performance. In the light of worldwide

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70 “Notes of meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Mr. Kishore Mahbubani, Dean, Civil Service College,” 5 Apr 1993, CSC Records.
71 Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012.
72 Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
media attention on the judicial caning of an American teenager convicted for vandalism, a case study was drawn up on dealing with the international press.74

Another difficulty was locating facilitators for case studies. So new was the andragogy in Singapore at that time that even local universities had very few qualified case study facilitators.75 Eventually, senior policy-makers led many case studies, injecting realism into these discussions: “The presence of the Ministers and Permanent Secretaries enabled participants to hear from the policy-makers themselves the detailed considerations that went into forming the various policies.”76

Official evaluations on CSC’s use of case studies are not available but the reflections of one reporter were illustrative. Warren Fernandez, a Straits Times correspondent, joined a CSC Public Policy Perspectives Seminar in 1994. After labouring over a case study with fellow participants for some time, the reporter lamented: “It came as a disappointment to some, that despite a host of ideas being bandied about, no one could think of a sensible alternative to the dreaded Certificate of Entitlement (COE).”77 Fernandez opined that the case study method uncovered the constraints of policy-making: “political debate in this country is often conducted in a vacuum. Charges are hurled without any clear idea of what the alternative might be. Demands are often made without much sense of their costs.”78 Fernandez, while not representative of all, was sold on the use of case study to examine policy-making:

Perhaps the case study method, coupled with discussions of the constraints facing policy makers, would make for a fascinating general studies course at our universities as well. It would serve as a good way of focusing young Singaporean minds on the key issues that lie ahead of them.79

8.6.3 Seminars, Lectures, Talks and Publications

The Public Policy Perspectives Seminar (PPPS) was not listed among the CSC’s milestone programmes but it was pegged to the career development of Administrative Service officers. Targeted at scholars who had just returned from overseas universities, PPPS aimed to prepare them for the local policy-making milieu in which they would be serving.80 Through case studies of actual policies, PPPS

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74 Michael Fay, an 18 year old American, and several teenagers were convicted of theft and vandalism in 1994. Fay’s sentence included 6 strokes of the cane, a routine penalty in Singapore courts. Despite President Bill Clinton’s plea for leniency, Singapore held firm to the sentence on grounds of the sovereignty of its courts. “Public Policy Perspectives Seminar,” Ethos Second Quarter (1994): 5-6.
75 “Notes of meeting between DPM Lee and Mahbubani,” 5 Apr 1993.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
allowed participants to debate and even disagree over these policies. Hence, even before new AOs attended the Foundation Course, which was a two month long and much more comprehensive induction programme, PPPS was effectively a shorter and more concise milestone programme preparing AOs for the Foundation Course.

As part of its mission to institutionalise and foster the élan of the Public Service among younger public officers, CSC organised a series of talks entitled ‘Reflections at Raffles’. These were essentially ‘fire-side’ chats with senior leaders of the Public Service, created as a platform to allow younger Administrative Service officers to meet and learn from the experiences of their ‘elders’. Held at Raffles Hotel, hence the series’ title, these sessions were styled in an informal setting to encourage dialogue.

‘New Insights Lecture Series’ sought to keep the Public Service’s leadership corps informed of external developments pertinent to their work. It featured speakers like the chief secretaries of the Malaysian and Hong Kong governments and leading thinkers such as Peter Senge who spoke on ‘Learning Organisation’. In conjunction with Canada’s Institute On Governance, CSC also ran a “Transforming Public Sector Leadership” workshop involving participants from Southeast Asia and Canada. These CSC programmes – while furthering training and development objectives – were also used as platforms for fostering relations with foreign civil services and governments.

In 1994, a year after its inauguration, CSC published Ethos. Mahbubani introduced the periodical as a platform for communicating with CSC’s stakeholders: “To reach out to our constituency, we will need a vehicle for communication.” Contents focused on reports of CSC events, such as milestone programmes, seminars and lectures. In each issue was usually an article on the “latest issues and politics challenging Singapore’s public sector”, with subjects ranging from budgeting to personnel management.

Like Bakti and Management Development, periodicals of earlier civil service training institutions, Ethos occasionally published speeches of ministers and interviews with leaders in the bureaucracy. Unlike Bakti, Ethos did not replicate articles from newspapers or other journals. Unlike Management Development,
*Ethos* did not publish academically formatted essays. In all purposes, *Ethos* was arguably more a corporate newsletter reporting on CSC and Public Service activities, though this was the role defined for it.

### 8.7 Heralding Change, Preparing for Change

In June 1994, the entire Public Service Division was transferred from the Finance Ministry to the direct jurisdiction of the Prime Minister’s Office.\(^{88}\) The government was evidently increasing its attention to the management of public officers, including their training and development, with the Civil Service College and Civil Service Institute remaining under the PSD (see Table 8.5).

Changes at the broad bureaucracy-level also percolated to the Civil Service College. Kishore Mahbubani was around the same time promoted to Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where had been serving concurrently to his Dean, CSC portfolio. At the same time, rotations involving the senior leadership of the Public Service Division would affect the future direction of CSC. Mahbubani recounted the confluence of factors:

> Once I became Perm Sec, I really wanted to focus on MFA. It was very difficult to be Perm Sec and Dean at the same time. So I handed over. And there was a new [Permanent Secretary, Public Service Division, and eventually] Head Civil Service, Lim Siong Guan. Andrew Chew [preceding PS(PSD) and Head of Civil Service] was prepared to leave the CSC alone and say: ‘You do whatever you want to do.’ He didn’t bother me. Siong Guan had a much more clearly defined vision for Civil Service College. So he wanted a Dean that he could work with full time, not a part-time Dean. So he switched and got Soo Hoon.”\(^{89}\)

Staff changes involving CSC began taking place, incrementally like chess-pieces lining up for a masterful game-changer. In the first instance, Miss Lim Soo Hoon, an Administrative Service officer, was posted into CSC as Deputy Dean; this allowed Peter Ong to be take up another posting in the Public Service as part of his AO rotation.\(^{90}\) Another AO, Zee Yong Kang, replaced Patricia Lam as Assistant Dean in the same exercise. In July 1995, Mahbubani relinquished his CSC appointment to concentrate on heading the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and Lim Soo Hoon succeeded as Dean of CSC (see Table 8.6).\(^{91}\)

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\(^{88}\) SAR 1995: 49.

\(^{89}\) Mahbubani, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012.


Table 8.5: Civil Service College in the Prime Minister’s Office, 1994

Organisational units arranged left to right according to the sequence they were presented in the original documents.

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92 SAR 1995: 48-49; Directory, Jul 1994: 715-723. Organisational units arranged left to right according to the sequence they were presented in the original documents.
In her first address as Dean, Lim Soo Hoon immediately positioned the Civil Service College as an agent of change: “As an agent of change for the Civil Service, CSC is at the forefront of the efforts to create the Public Service for the 21st Century.”

The Public Service for the 21st Century, abbreviated as PS21, was the set of reforms initiated by the Committee of Permanent Secretaries in May 1995. With a broader aim of keeping Singapore competitive as the country became a developed economy, PS21 sought to orientate the bureaucracy towards a culture of “service excellence” and “continuous change for greater efficiency and effectiveness.”

Among the series of follow-up measures was the target for every Public Service employee to receive 12.5 days of annual training by the year 2000. This obviously necessitated mobilising the bureaucracy’s training institutions. Indeed, within six months of Lim Soo Hoon taking over CSC, announcements were made that the Public Service’s training centres would be reorganised. CSC was renamed the Institute of Policy Development and merged with an Institute of Public Administration and Management, renamed from the Civil Service Institute. The new central training institution that emerged was named Civil Service College, with Miss Lim Soo Hoon as Dean. This reorganisation of CSC and CSI into the new Civil Service College is discussed in the next chapter.

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8.8 Conclusion

The Civil Service College, from its formal inception in 1993 to its reorganisation in 1996, was paradoxically the shortest training initiative in the history of the Singapore Public Service, yet the most significant in the growth of training and development in that bureaucracy. The CSC finally brought to realisation a meaningful leadership development centre for the Administrative Service leadership corps after decades of futile experimentation.

In the evolution of training and development, the Civil Service College was a progression in the Singapore bureaucracy’s use of training for reforms. Its focus on leadership development and preparing the Public Service for the future sought to build up the strategic capacity of the bureaucracy. This, compared with the Political Study Centre producing a dependable bureaucracy and the STI and CSI equipping civil servants with technical competencies, was a step-up advancement in the continuum of executive development and training in the Singapore Public Service.

The device of the conceptual framework rooted the subject in the proper contexts. From the perspective of the Public Service, besides raising a dedicated leadership development institute was the imperative of fostering the values and élan that epitomised the Singapore Public Service. From the perspective of the state in the analytic framework, a new generation of People’s Action Party leaders saw CSC as necessary to inculcate within AOs the political acumen required to finesse the formulation and implementation of public policies. From its conception, thus, the Civil Service College was envisioned as a point to introduce reforms into the leadership corps of the bureaucracy.

Secondly, the realisation of the CSC highlighted the importance of strong political support for the development of training initiatives in the bureaucracy. Besides empowering it to overcome influential detractors, the strong political support allowed a very deliberate selection of the team of AOs whose vision and competence helped set up CSC. Kishore Mahbubani, Peter Ong, Patricia Lam and the very small team that made up CSC at that time deserved credit for germinating the ideas giving rise to the milestones programmes and their dogged determination in overcoming resistance towards the CSC proposal. Reflecting upon their roles, however, Mahbubani took a long view: “[This was] phase one, I was just foundational, Peter Ong and I were just foundational, putting in place the people, processes, organisation and so on and so forth.”98 More critically, in Mahbubani’s opinion, the most important factor in setting up CSC – indeed for saving CSC from still-birth – was the high level of political attention

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98 Mahbubani, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012.
accorded to CSC: “[then-DPM Lee Hsien Loong] took a personal interest, like in the LAP. He was personally interested in checking everything.” 99 Peter Ong elaborated on the importance of political attention in helping CSC’s programmes:

[then-DPM Lee] himself went through development in milestone programmes in SAF. So he understood what it meant to get Air Force, Army and Navy to work together, to have a shared sense of esprit de corps. When he was Minister for MTI [Ministry of Trade and Industry], we took policies of different agencies and put it together and said that all these required collective sense of understanding, what is micro-economic efficiency of policies, and then reviewing each one across different agencies. So what we saw in his thinking of CSC reflected his own experiences through the SAF and his own experiences of policy review across the whole-of-government – we never used ‘whole-of-government’ at that time. So he felt something was needed. And he personally chose many of the case studies. 100

Indeed, a particularly prominent factor in the genesis and development of CSC and its programmes was the high level of political support devoted to it.

Finally, the most significant accomplishment of the CSC was not just the production of a set of leadership development programmes but in the enduring timelessness of this framework. For the first time in the history of the Singapore Public Service, there was a comprehensive set of training programmes at various stages in the career progression of the Administrative Service and senior officers. Although it inherited the Foundation Course from the Civil Service Institute, the CSC conceptualised and launched two additional courses: the Senior Management Programme for mid-career officers and Leaders in Administration Programme for senior officers. More important than drawing up these individual courses was CSC’s threading together all three programmes into a coherent suite of development interventions matching the career progression of AOs. The timelessness of this framework developed by CSC was demonstrated by the continued usage of these milestone programmes for leadership development by the present-day Civil Service College.

The new Civil Service College, resulting from the centralisation of the CSC and Civil Service Institute in 1996 to harness training as a point of introducing the Public Service for the 21st Century reforms, is the subject of the next chapter.

99 Ibid.
100 Peter Ong, Interview with Author, 6 Jun 2012.
In April 1996, the two existing central training schools of the Singapore Public Service underwent a major reorganisation. The leadership development centre set up in 1993 as the Civil Service College was renamed the Institute of Policy Development; the Civil Service Institute became the Institute of Public Administration and Management. Both institutes were then subsumed under a new Civil Service College. Within four years, the Civil Service College would be further restructured, detached out of the civil service to become a self-financing statutory board.

This chapter shows that the series of organisational changes involving the Civil Service College were in reality a consolidation of the various training functions into a focal point to introduce administrative reforms. The series of re-structuring seemed like a myriad re-labelling of the training schools, but these were in reality part of a broader strategy to align the training institutions to support the reforms agenda. This started off by centralising the different training functions into an umbrella Civil Service College, preparing the transition into the next phase of the strategy. Following on was a controlled experiment, essentially, to compel training programmes aligned towards the reforms agenda, by introducing market principles into an institute. The success of this trial emboldened the leadership of the Public Service to then detach CSC from the Civil Service and convert it into a self-financing statutory board. Thus, rather than a seemingly arbitrary or piece-meal re-structuring of the training institutions, the various changes in names and structures were in fact set-pieces on a chess-board building up towards the goal of setting up CSC as a statutory board. But that was not an end-goal by itself; the ultimate objective of turning CSC into a statutory board was to orientate the training functions to support the agenda for administrative reforms.

This chapter, thus, argues that the organisational changes between 1996 and 2001 were part of a grand strategy to align the Civil Service College into a focal point for introducing reforms across the Singapore Public Service.

9.1 PS21 - The Emerging Bureaucratic Context

The reorganisation of the central training schools of the Singapore Public Service in 1996 was driven by broader developments in the bureaucratic context, specifically PS21. “Public Service for the 21st Century”, launched in May 1995, was a...
series of long-term reforms. According to Lim Siong Guan, Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister’s Office, the objectives of PS21 were:

To nurture an attitude of service excellence…[and] foster an environment which induces and welcomes continuous change for greater efficiency and effectiveness [with the ultimate outcome] a Public Service always on the lookout for improvement, for better ways of doing things, questioning if it should carry on doing what it is doing, asking what else it should be doing.2

PS21 coincided with the wave of administrative reforms sweeping across the world in the 1990s: ‘small government’, decentralisation and application of private sector managerial techniques on public administration, i.e. New Public Management. The official account of the Singapore bureaucracy noted that “devolution – the loosening of central controls – was a key theme for the Public Service throughout the 1990s.”3 But in an interview for this study, Lim Siong Guan distinguished PS21 by its quest for ‘excellence’:

The whole impetus for PS21 has nothing to do with the idea of ‘small government’ and so forth. However, there’s a lot we learnt. …the things that happened in the times of Thatcher, we studied them a lot. They are good ideas on what can be done to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The most fundamental idea of all [with PS21] is this idea that it is not good enough to be efficient, it is not good enough to look for effectiveness. There is this whole concept of ‘excellence’ – and ‘excellence’ is being the best that you can be, it’s a never ending journey, being the best that you can be – which to me is a different paradigm than just ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’. I think most of the time when we talk about what happened with ‘small government’, they are very much confined to the idea of ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’.4

Although the Singapore Public Service was known for its “competence, efficiency and integrity” by the 1990s, there were areas needing improvement:

- reducing the dependence on rules and precedents in making decisions,
- fostering a more open attitude to change and innovation, greater empowerment at the lower levels of the Public Service, more emphasis upon performance and outputs to ensure higher quality services, and making public servants in dealing with the public more flexible, courteous and helpful.5

4 Lim Siong Guan, Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister’s Office), 1994 – 1998, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.
Indeed, Lim Siong Guan, who came to be regarded as the chief advocate of PS21, was conscious that the Singapore Public Service should neither rest on its laurels nor be lured into a sense of complacency:

The reason why the motto [for PS21] was ‘Be in time for the future’, was because of this sense that the Singapore Public Service already had such a high standing worldwide, it had a high standing for efficiency and competence and integrity. So if everybody in the world say, ‘You are already so good,’ and the people in the Service therefore also say, ‘We are already so good,’ then how do we move our people to be thinking about how can we be better?

That’s why the motto came out to be ‘Just in time for the future.’ It is to say, ‘Who of you can claim we are good enough for the future?’ The future is unknowable, the future is uncertain? And so who in the Service, not even the political leadership, can claim to know? And that’s why the motto is ‘Be in time for the future.’ The idea of PS21 is to be able to work in that future and that future is really what we are prepared to imagine, visualise, take initiative, try out and hence the whole idea about engaging people and imagining the future.\(^6\)

This need for further reforms, in-spite of the already stellar accomplishments of the Singapore bureaucracy, was recognised by the Committee of Permanent Secretaries – the apex leadership body of the Public Service – which threw its support behind PS21.\(^7\)

The operating milieu of the Singapore Public Service, in any case, was already evolving: “first, a public that is increasingly demanding higher standards of service, and second, an economy that is increasingly outward-oriented.”\(^8\)

### 9.1.1 The Political Dimension

The political dimension of PS21, even though it was a project of the bureaucracy, cannot be missed. With the Public Service often regarded by the population as ‘the government’ – everyday-citizens do not bother with the legal distinctions between the political leadership and the career bureaucrats in daily discourse – a Public Service that could not measure up to the citizenry’s growing demands could have repercussions upon the ruling People’s Action Party.

The dipping electoral fortunes of the PAP had led to a framing of the development-democratisation discourse upon Singapore, as discussed in the previous chapter. After its share of electoral votes fell through the 1980s, the PAP suffered its worst-ever performance at the 1991 General Elections.\(^9\) Development-democratisation theorists inevitably wondered if Singapore was heading the way of Taiwan, Korea,
Thailand and the Philippines. The developmental-state, i.e. state-led rapid industrialisation and economic-social development as espoused by Chalmers Johnson, had expanded a middle class whose rising educational levels and affluence were leading them to seek greater participatory roles in the political system. While the development-democratisation nexus unfolded in several East Asian Newly-Industrialising Countries, scholars refrained from plotting the trajectory of Singapore.

The PAP leadership was naturally not unaffected by its electoral performance, whether or not they were informed of the development-democratisation theory. Political considerations evidently figured in the ruling party’s interactions with the bureaucracy in the aftermath of the watershed 1991 polls. The political leadership certainly felt that there were occasions the government’s "most well-meaning policy" was undermined by civil servants taking “clinical view” in implementation. Part of the raison d'être in the 1993 setting up the Civil Service College was to sharpen the political acumen of Administrative Service and leadership echelons of the Public Service.

With a focus on greater efficiency and effectiveness in policy-making and service delivery, PS21 could not be divorced from the political context at that time. While an initiative of the Public Service, with another election due within two years following the 1991 electoral setback, PS21’s drive to raise service standards among public officers could reasonably be expected to also be directed at arresting further electoral slippage.

However, Lim Siong Guan, who led PS21 clarified that PS21 was wholly a project of the Public Service; the political leadership did not play any part in the bureaucracy’s administrative reforms. In an interview for this study, Lim explained that,

We [the Public Service] never cleared the [PS21] initiative with the political leadership. I took a position like this: political leadership makes policy decision, PS21 is about delivery. ‘How well do you deliver policy?’ That’s a specific, to my mind, a specific responsibility of the Public Service. It’s got nothing to do with the political leadership, that’s why it was never cleared with the political leadership.

Basically to my mind it’s like this, there’s no need to ask for permission for these things. You are doing something which is good, you are doing something which is your responsibility, you are doing something which intends to really raise the capabilities of the Public Service and raise the standards as well as the achievement and capabilities of Singapore, why do you need to ask for permission, just carry on.

To be quite frank, I took the position that PS21 is the responsibility of the Civil Service.

11 Ong Teng Cheong (1992) 18. Also “Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, at the Third Administrative Service Dinner, 5 July 1991”.
12 Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.
9.1.2 PS21 and the Review of Training in the Public Service

PS21 was “the most comprehensive administrative reform to be introduced in Singapore.” Indeed, PS21 is a topic deserving dedicated study but to provide a brief context for the current discussion, PS21 constituted four focal areas:

- staff well-being, focusing on the individual public officer;
- service quality, focusing on the customer, i.e. the citizenry;
- Work Improvement Teams and Staff Suggestion Schemes, focusing on developing officers towards an attitude of continuous improvement; and
- organisational review, focusing on structuring government agencies towards strategic improvements.

Most of these initiatives were already operating for several years. WITS, for example, started in the 1980s. PS21, hence, was really “an extension of existing schemes and campaigns”. But the combined effects of these concurrent efforts under the PS21 banner, and the main thrust of PS21, were to improve the quality of public services delivered to the citizenry.

A parallel emphasis of PS21 was in the area of training, which relates directly to this study. Training was recognised as a medium to improve the quality of public services: “Mr Lim Siong Guan … believed that people development was a very important part of raising the professionalism of the Public Service.” Lim himself, the architect of PS21, centred the subject of training within the context of the reforms in a fitting metaphor:

if you see the [civil servant] standing on a platform, around him are the demands of the public and … you need to serve them with quality service. At the same time, he’s under continuous pressure from the top, from his bosses, on how to improve the organisation, and for want of a better word, we use the term, Organisational Review. So you look at this guy, and he’s being squashed, he’s being squashed from the side, he’s being squashed from the top.

So we say, ‘How do we develop his muscles? How do we make him strong enough to be able to handle this?’ And that idea was Excel – Excellence through Continuous Enterprise and Learning. The way to develop his muscles was to build up his competency, build up his skills-level, most of all build up his abilities to serve the citizenry.

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14 Lim Siong Guan, in his interview for this study, pointed out that PS21 cannot be taken in isolation; PS21 is tightly linked with two other initiatives: Scenario Planning and Currently Estimated Potential. Scenario Planning explores future challenges facing Singapore and capacities needed in the face of these scenarios. Currently Estimated Potential, apart from developing civil servants to their fullest potential, helps to identify talented officers and develop them in preparation for leadership positions. Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.


17 Lim Soo Hoon, Dean, Civil Service College, 1995 – 1998, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012
confidence. And confidence is built up by doing stuff, and succeeding. That’s why we have continuous enterprise. Try, learn, succeed.18

Lim Siong Guan, as Permanent Secretary in charge of the Public Service Division and hence responsible for personnel matters in the Public Service, set “the target of delivering 12.5 days of training per year for each employee by the year 2000, partly to improve the quality of public service, and partly to enhance the long term employability of public servants.”19 This 100 hours was a five-fold increase in the commitment towards training, until then averaging 2.8 days.20 Ms Lim Soo Hoon, who would play a critical part in the Public Service’s use of training to introduce reforms, elaborated: “what to me was important about the policy was that, first, the signal that you believe in it, that it was an entitlement. That meant your boss cannot say: ‘I can’t spare you [to go for training].’ Everyone has a right to go for training.”21

As part of the PS21 reforms, a review of training was initiated. At that point in time, the two central training schools were the Civil Service Institute and the Civil Service College. The Civil Service College, with Kishore Mahbubani as Dean, was responsible for training the Administrative Service leadership of the Public Service, as described in the preceding chapter. According to Ms Lim Soo Hoon, “the original CSC, was more like a think-tank. Whereas Mr Lim [Siong Guan's] was a more practise-oriented approach … introduce policy development, introduce training on policy.” Around this time, Mahbubani was promoted to the position of Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

Once I became Perm Sec, I really wanted to focus on MFA. It was very difficult to be Perm Sec and Dean at the same time. ….And there was a new Head Civil Service [sic] Lim Siong Guan. Andrew Chew was prepared to leave the CSC alone and say: ‘You do whatever you want to do.’ He didn’t bother me. Siong Guan had a much more clearly defined vision for Civil Service College. So he wanted a Dean that he could work with full time, not a part-time Dean. So he switched and got Soo Hoon.”22

In March 1995, Ms Lim Soo Hoon was posted into CSC as Deputy Dean, allowing incumbent Peter Ong to take up another assignment as part of his Administrative Service rotation. Within four months, Ms Lim succeeded Kishore Mahbubani as Dean. Almost immediately, Lim Soon Hoon began positioning CSC “at

18 Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.
19 Lim Siong Guan 38.
21 Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
22 Mahbubani, Interview with Author, 20 Jun 2012. Lim Siong Guan was appointed Head of the Civil Service in 1999; at that point in time in 1995, Lim Siong Guan was Permanent Secretary of the Public Service Division.
the forefront of the efforts to create the Public Service for the 21st Century launched just two months earlier.

The other central institution at that time was the Civil Service Institute. In the 1990s, as described in an earlier chapter, CSI had over 100 programmes annually catering to 20,000 civil servants or 22% of the bureaucracy. But a predominantly rank-and-file clientele resulted in the CSI’s image as a broad-based training school. “Those who wanted a little bit more, I supposed a little bit more sophisticated, more branded training,” Lim Soo Hoon remembered, “they would probably go outside CSI.”

Yet, for the Public Service to achieve its PS21 aim of providing every civil servant with 100 hours of annual training, the bulk of these training would undoubtedly have to be undertaken by CSI. Evidently, while PS21 was being conceptualised, plans were also underway to level up the training institutions to meet PS21 aspirations. Ms Lim recounted, “When I moved up, Mr Lim [Siong Guan] said he wanted to consolidate training. He gave me the task of merging the old CSI with the new animal called CSC …. So when I joined, I was given the task of merging CSI and CSC.”

9.2 The New Civil Service College – Rebranding the Institutes

9.2.1 Consolidation of Training Functions

On 1 Apr 1996, a new Civil Service College was thus established under the Public Service Division, which in turn was within the purview of the Prime Minister’s Office (see Table 9.1). This reporting line, similar with those of preceding central training schools, continued to locate training and development as a subject within the personnel management portfolio, and a matter of high level attention to the government.

The new CSC, with Ms Lim Soo Hoon as Dean, consolidated the existing training institutions under its control (see Table 9.2). The Institute of Policy Development continued with leadership development among the Administrative Service officers and senior echelons of the Public Service. The Institute of Public Administration and Management, with Ms Teo Hee Lian remaining as director, continued with the

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26 Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
27 Ibid.
Table 9.1: Civil Service College in the Prime Minister's Office, 1996

Directory, Jul 1996: 683-695. Organisational units arranged left to right according to the sequence they were presented in the original documents.
Table 9.2: Structure of the Civil Service College, 1996

Director, Ms Teo Hee Lian

Director, Ms Chang Hwee Nee

Director, Lim Ang Yong

Planning Unit
Management Development Centre
Productivity & Quality Development Centre
Human Resource Development Centre
Corporate Support Development Centre
Business Promotion Unit
Training Support Services
Administration
Allocated Provision & Examinations

Audio-Visual, Graphic Art
Finance & Personnel, General Services
Building Management & Projects, Library Services

Directory, Jul 1996: 690-695. Organisational units arranged left to right according to the sequence they were presented in the original documents.
training of the broader Public Service. A Civil Service Consulting Group (CSCG) was created to provide training consultancy services to government agencies.

The restructuring appeared to have been well-thought through in advance. Lim Soo Hoon, the newly appointed Dean, explained:

the structure is important to support the policy...[because] you signalled to everyone, individuals as well as the bosses, that training was critical. And then we were very clear about different segments of people who needed to be trained. What were the capability-gaps that we needed to fill? So those were the early days, and the structure was important to make sure that you have people dedicated to focusing on different areas. 31

Before the newly reorganised CSC could fully support PS21 reforms, however, some housekeeping was necessary: harmonising the various training institutes into a common CSC organisational culture. IPAM staff, in particular, were reeling from what they perceived as the relegation of their institute into the shadow of IPD. Since the latter’s establishment in 1993, as the then-Civil Service College, IPAM in its earlier permutation as CSI had to cede its leadership programmes and then its premises to the newer Civil Service College. Ms Teo Hee Lian, then-CSI director, recalled: “we were seen as not compatible. .... we were just told make way [for the new College].” 32

When the reorganisation was mooted, CSI staff did not understand why their institute with a longer history and larger staff complement should be subsumed under the name of a smaller Civil Service College. The rationale was not a deliberate favouring of the leadership centre, according to Lim Soo Hoon, who was tasked with the reorganisation:

The real reason was because CSI had baggage. ... CSI was doing all these broad-based training, the levels of people they were covering, Super-scale [apex grades] all the way to Division 4. There was a certain baggage, certain brand name, .... If we still called it CSI, people would still have the perception that it was the same thing. So we had to refresh it, re-brand it. And we thought that CSC was a very good name. 33

Looking back, more time to consult with staff could have generated wider acceptance for the changes. Time, however, was a luxury that Ms Lim could not afford:

when I did this first merger, I mean, that was probably one of my first experiences doing something like that. Of course on hindsight now, we can say, I could have handled it better, I could have done this, and I could have done that. But one of the problems I had then was there was no assurance how long I would be there for. And I think this is one of the biggest problems that AOs sometimes faced, we move from place to place. And sometimes people will be quite cynical: ‘You guys come and shake up the place, change, change, change.

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31 Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
32 Teo Hee Lian, Director, CSI and IPAM, 1989 – 1998, Interview with Author, 3 Jan 2012.
33 Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.
And before the thing is over, you guys just disappear and leave the mess behind for other people to clear up."\footnote{Lim Soo Hoon, Interview with Author, 15 Jun 2012.}

Lim wanted to see through the changes, to avoid leaving CSC and its staff in a lurch.

In any case, the CSC’s restructuring was not an end in itself but to ready the training institutions to serve PS21 reforms. The reorganisation could be formalised overnight on 1 April 1996, but to realise the necessary changes — including training activities — required time. The inventory of courses disseminated among public officers that year continued to be issued in the name of Civil Service Institute; \textit{Training Programme 1996/97} contained no indications of the organisational changes concerning it.\footnote{\textit{Ibid} x, compared with \textit{Training Programme 1994/95}: 6 and 8.} A new section of courses, compared with previous years’ training directory, made reference to PS21 but most were existing courses re-arranged under the PS21 headline. In the one year since the launch of PS21, only two new dedicated PS21 courses were developed.\footnote{Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.}

\textbf{9.2.2 Aligning Training for Reforms}

The changes intended by CSC’s re-structuring began to show a year later. Changes in the Institute of Policy Development were, while less apparent on the surface, crucial. IPD continued its milestone programmes for the Administrative Service but the curriculum had a new emphasis.\footnote{“Courses Update,” \textit{Ethos} (Jan 1997): 17.} Lim Siong Guan, who as Permanent Secretary of the Public Service Division oversaw the bureaucracy’s personnel and the CSC, saw IPD playing a critical role, beyond developing the leadership corps, in forging among the leaders of the Public Service a ‘Coordinated Vision’:

\begin{quote}
what we required is what I called ‘Coordinated Vision’. As opposed to what people generally talked about ‘Coordinated Action’, to try to coordinate the activities of various ministries and all that. I didn’t consider that to be the primary need; I considered the primary need to be ‘Coordinated Vision’. In other words, can the people across all the ministries and stat [statutory] boards, do we have a common idea of the kind of challenges Singapore faces, the kinds of opportunities that we can use, and a vision therefore of what Singapore wants to get to and what we can be. And the Admin Service plays a primary role, not just the Admin Service, really the senior leadership of the public sector all across, the CEOs of statutory boards, everybody plays an important factor in this. And to me that was the critical goal of the IPD.\footnote{Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.}
\end{quote}

The re-alignment of the Institute of Public Administration and Management with PS21 reforms was most pronounced. A new Director of IPAM, David Ma, was appointed following the retirement of Ms Teo Hee Lian. But more significant was his...
direct linkage with PS21 reforms: Ma was concurrently Head of the PS21 Office (PSO) at the Public Service Division. Overseeing PS21 initiatives across the bureaucracy in that capacity, Ma was posted into CSC as part of the plans to align training with PS21: since I was familiar with PS21, because I was then ...Head of the PSO, Mr Lim [Siong Guan] said, ‘Since we needed to make training to support PS21’, I was put in as Deputy Head of the Civil Service Consulting... when Hee Lian retired, I just took over. I supposed the reason why I was posted there, people expect that this fellow is going to take over. The whole idea was to support PS21.\footnote{David Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013. Also Directory July 1996: 689}

Among IPAM’s adjustments to support PS21, was a Training Framework that mirrored the PS21 Training Initiative. More significant than offering relevant training to public officers at various stages of their careers were aims beyond officers’ current work needs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>This is to introduce the officer to the job and his work environment upon joining the service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>This is training to enable the officer to perform his job adequately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>This is additional training to enable the officer to give superior performance on his current job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>This is further training to enable the officer to go beyond his current job to be able to handle related jobs on an incidental basis or higher level jobs in due course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Continuing| This is training that is not immediately related to the officer’s current job but enhances his employability over the long-term.\footnote{Commonwealth Secretariat 39. Compare with Training Directory, 1997 – 1998: iv.}

At every career stage, IPAM developed “five groups of generic competence”:

**Managing service excellence** courses help the individual understand the importance of quality management and service excellence and equip him with the tools and techniques to do an excellent job.

**Managing change** courses help the individual develop a positive attitude to change and equip him with the skills to manage it.

**Managing/working with people** courses develop the individual’s ability to better gain the cooperation and commitment of his colleagues.

**Managing operations and resources** courses provide the individual with the necessary tools and techniques to manage his work unit effectively and efficiently.

**Managing self** courses help build the individual’s confidence in himself and increase his effectiveness – both inside and outside his job functions.\footnote{Training Directory, 1997 – 1998 iv. This was the handiwork of Tina Tan, IPAM senior manager, and another IPAM staff. Tina Tan, Senior Manager, IPAM, circa 1997, Interview with Author, 31 Oct 2013.}

The resultant matrix of lateral competencies cutting across every stage of the officers’ career progression would thus guide IPAM in drawing up programmes to support PS21.
9.2.3 ‘Diverge, then Converge’ – Expansion of Training Programmes to Meet PS21

With a reforms-framework to guide course development, the training programmes began to align with PS21. As a benchmark, in 1996 the then-CSI only developed two PS21-related courses and rearranged some existing programmes under the PS21 tagline (see Table 9.3). A year after reorganisation into IPAM, the number of PS21-linked courses increased slightly to 15 (see Table 9.4). Their proportion to the overall number of courses – including regular staples such as management and supervisory training, vocational and functional skills – remained the same. But IPAM had increased its total course-offerings by 17% to 177 courses, training 20,000 officers or about one-third of all civil servants. Training Officer, Ms Ngiam Su Wei, remembered that IPAM was “introducing many different training programmes, just to ramp up…. I saw a surge in terms of the numbers [in order to cater to the PS21 target of] 100 training hours.” IPAM also began framing its courses according to the competency-career stages matrix developed to support the PS21 goals of cultivating attitudes of service excellence and continuous change among public officers.

### Table 9.3: PS21 and Regular Courses offered by CSI, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1996</th>
<th>Division I</th>
<th>Division II</th>
<th>Division III</th>
<th>Division IV</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Courses</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Training</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Training</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS21 Courses</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

42 Training Directory, 1997 – 1998: i; Budget FY1998/99: 64. There were 62,963 civil servants at that time.
43 Ngiam Su Wei, Training Officer, IPAM, circa 1997, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.
44 Table computed from CSI, Training Programme 1996/97. Regular courses refer to those core training programmes pertaining to management training, supervisory training, vocational and functional skills, which were non-PS21 specific training. The total number of courses may be less than the sum of courses in each Division as some courses were targeted at officers across several Divisions.
By 1998, PS21-courses increased to 25 (see Table 9.5). Although their proportion to the total IPAM courses dipped slightly to 7%, this actually highlighted the very substantial increase in IPAM’s regular programmes to 352 courses. IPAM was also aiming to accommodate 45,000 trainees or 69% of the total 64,963 number of civil servants. In 1999, IPAM reported training 92,000 officers, technically reaching out to all 67,795 civil servants, with some returning as repeat customers. By 2000, the timeline for the PS21 goal of offering officers 100 hours of annual training, IPAM was able to raise the total number of course-offerings to 458 (see Table 9.6).

![Table 9.4: PS21 and Regular Courses offered by IPAM, 1997](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Division I</th>
<th>Division II</th>
<th>Division III</th>
<th>Division IV</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Regular Courses</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS21 Courses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>162</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>177</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.5: PS21 and Regular Courses offered by IPAM, 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Division I</th>
<th>Division II</th>
<th>Division III</th>
<th>Division IV</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Regular Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS21 Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>327</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>352</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.6: PS21 and Regular Courses offered by IPAM, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Division I</th>
<th>Division II</th>
<th>Division III</th>
<th>Division IV</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Regular Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS21 Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>458</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45 Table computed from Training Directory, 1997 – 1998.
46 Training Directory, 1998: ii; Budget FY1998-99: 64. With total number of civil servants rising slightly to 62,963, IPAM’s 20,000 officers trained represented 32% of the Civil Service.
48 Table computed from Training Directory, 1998.
49 Table computed from Training Directory, 2000.
These developments were in line with, indeed, part of the broader strategy drawn up earlier. Mrs Tina Tan, an IPAM manager at that time, revealed that the spike in number of courses was planned out early in 1997:

I had to write up the training paper where I had to project the training volume for five years, to 1.6 million training hours! I remember [asking], ‘Huh! Mr Ma, how am I going to achieve 1.6 million!’ Yeah, that was my target, to reach it in five years, from 1997.50

Presented with the opportunity, Mrs Tan quizzed the Permanent Secretary (Public Service Division): “I had a conversation with Mr Lim Siong Guan. I said, ‘We are doing all these things, don’t know whether relevant or not.’ Because we had to push up all these [training] hours!” Lim’s rather philosophical reply confirmed, once again, that these developments were a purposefully drawn up plan in motion: “He [Lim Siong Guan] said, ‘Never mind, now is the time to diverge, later we will converge.’”52

The tables of IPAM courses between 1996 and 1999 above also highlighted the continued emphasis on senior levels of the hierarchy. Courses for Division One officers dominated the inventory. This was an extension of the long-standing policy, since the inception of the Public Service, of nurturing talented personnel. The weightier emphasis could also reflect the point-roles Division One officers were expected to play in leading PS21 reforms among staff across government agencies.

At the same time, the increase in course offerings was evident across all divisional levels, reflecting efforts to be equitable in training opportunities. Courses for Division Two, for example, leapt to 109 in 1998 from 40 the previous year, while those for Division Three jumped to 73 from 29. The exponential rise could be attributed to the small number of courses in earlier periods. But it also pointed to new efforts to develop training opportunities for the broader rank-and-file of the Public Service hierarchy.

This exponential increase in the number of courses and capacity to accommodate so many officers in such a short period of three to four years was directly due to “12.5 [days of] annual training per [public] officer … reinforced upon us,” according to one IPAM training officer at that time. In Rinkoo Ghosh’s memories, “CSI to IPAM restructuring was pressure for us because LSG [Lim Siong Guan] said we need to offer training to ensure officers reach 12.5 days per year quota.”53 In other words, PS21 reforms was the raison d’être for the rapid expansion in IPAM’s capacity to provide training across the Public Service.

50 Tina Tan, Interview with Author, 31 Oct 2013.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Rinkoo Ghosh, Training Officer, IPAM, circa 1997, email correspondence with Author, 15 Sep 2013.
9.2.4 Injecting Catalyst for Change

Amidst the quantitative growth in programmes, David Ma, Director IPAM, was conscious of the need to maintain the quality of IPAM’s training:

The problem to me was, we can expand the courses but how do we know whether the courses are useful to people? …. ‘How to make our courses more relevant, more useful?’ So that when we expand, people would still say, ‘I want to come because yours is useful to me.’

Few options were available to monitor the standards of these courses, let alone improve their quality. Like many training institutions then, IPAM was using course evaluations to gauge the quality of its courses. Rather than objective measures, these were impressions by participants. To Donald Kirkpatrick, who researched the evaluation of training, this constituted “Reaction”, which was the most basic of four levels of evaluation. According to several training officers at that time, IPAM could at most – through end-of-course tests – attained Level Two, assessing whether learning had been internalised among participants. Only in one programme was IPAM able “to move from Smiles Sheet [Level One, Reaction] to Level Three – Behaviour.” Levels Three and Four, examining the effects of training upon participants’ behaviour at work and long-term job performance, were beyond the reach of IPAM. With successive cohorts of public officers, IPAM did not have the wherewithal to evaluate the large number of officers across government agencies three to six months after the end of their training. More important than want of resources, IPAM did not have the mandate to pursue a comprehensive evaluation across the bureaucracy.

In lieu of more practicable recourse, David Ma placed IPAM on Inter-Departmental Charging funding model (IDC). Until then, the central training schools – as departments within the bureaucracy – had always been funded by the government. With Inter-Departmental Charging, Ma was cutting off his own funding:

I got the Ministry of Finance not to give us the money but to give that money to all the ministries…. So instead of giving us the $10 million [for example, the Finance Ministry] would spread that $10 million among the civil servants. … we would organise courses, and we would charge the ministries for a fee.

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54 David Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013.
55 Ibid.
57 Ghosh, email correspondence with Author, 15 Sep 2013; Ngiam Su Wei, email correspondence with Author, 14 Oct 2013.
58 Level 1 evaluation, gauging the Reaction level of participants, are often referred to as ‘Smiles Sheet’, the implied reference was it seeks only to assess whether participants ‘feel good’. IPAM was able to undertake Level 3 evaluation for a Learning Organisation programme because it spanned over a one year period. Ghosh, email correspondence with Author, 15 Sep 2013.
59 David Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013.
60 Ibid. Also David Ma, email correspondence with Author, 16 Sep 2013.
Transferring training budgets to the ministries also prodded them to be responsible for the training of their staff. Mylvaganam Logendran, a manager at IPAM then, recalled that the previous practice left ministries and participants with the impression that training was ‘free’: ‘people when they felt like coming, they came; when they didn’t feel like coming, they didn’t come. That was not fair. You have a class here, you have to pay the trainers, you have the equipment, refreshment was based on the number of participants.’\(^{61}\) The Inter-Departmental Charging model, in contrast, made civil servants “understand that there’s a cost to training.”\(^{62}\)

The risk while ‘ring-fenced’ was stark.\(^{63}\) According to some IPAM officers at that time, although the central training budget was distributed among the ministries, the ministries’ options were limited to spending the money for IPAM courses, or not send their staff to IPAM; ministries could not use the budget on training by external providers. The salaries of IPAM officers, being civil servants, were also assured even should IPAM fail to attract anyone to its programmes. Yet, should government agencies decide not to subscribe to IPAM’s programmes, IPAM could face relegation into obsolescence.

To complicate matters, economic outlook deteriorated dramatically in mid-1997 as currency crises spread across Southeast Asia. The People’s Action Party government empowered by a “decisive victory” at elections earlier that year – winning 81 of the 83 Parliamentary seats and 63.5% popular vote bettering its 1991 outing – initiated a series of fiscal measures.\(^{64}\) As events turned out, the Singapore economy managed “better-than-expected”\(^{65}\) 7.8% growth.

For IPAM, government agencies’ subscription to its programmes did not dip. As it grew the number of courses in accordance to the PS21 goal, the number of civil servant-participants rose to soak up the supply. On reflection, Ms Ngiam thought:

in a way, IDC would be a ‘test’ for us to see if public sector agencies would send their officers to CSC for training. If our programmes were good, we should be able to see better subscriptions to our programmes. So, in a way, IDC was one way to ensure that we offer quality training programmes to the Public Service.\(^{66}\)

Meeting the needs of external government agencies cloaked the real subjects of this Inter-Departmental Charging model. Although IDC sought to maintain the quality of courses, Ma – by staking IPAM’s viability to the internal market – wanted to impress

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\(^{62}\) Ngiam Su Wei, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.
\(^{63}\) Tina Tan, Interview with Author, 31 Oct 2013; Michelle Wong, Course Administrator, IPAM, circa1997, Interview with Author, 24 Oct 2013; Ngiam Su Wei, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.
\(^{66}\) Ngiam Su Wei, email correspondence with Author, 14 Oct 2013.
upon staff the imperative of delivering high-quality programmes to the internal market. IDC was essentially an application of the New Public Management principle – though Ma said he was not influenced by it – of injecting competition to improve services: “with competition, you made sure that your courses have to be useful. Otherwise, ministries don’t have to come. They can go anywhere. They can go to the universities.” The real end-goal, hence, was to instil within IPAM staff an attitude of service excellence. In all purposes, Inter-Departmental Charging triggered off PS21 reforms within IPAM. For the training institution to be the point of introducing reforms into the bureaucracy, it first needed to undergo that reform.

9.3 Becoming a Statutory Board

9.3.1 Market-Competition to Stimulate Quality Training

Sometime in 1998, Brigadier-General Yam Ah Mee, who had just completed his service in the air force, was posted to the Public Service Division as part of his Administrative Service posting. As Deputy Secretary (Development) to Permanent Secretary Lim Siong Guan, BG Yam oversaw the PS21 Office and Strategic Planning Office and was concurrently Dean over the Civil Service College (see Table 9.7). One of his first tasks was to inject fresh impetus into the PS21 movement, suggesting an ‘innovative and entrepreneurial Civil Service’ as a new goal for the reform drive. This, Yam recalled, met with,

a lot of concerns, by some groups of people that the Civil Service, if it would to be entrepreneurial, it would tilt too much towards profit-driven. So eventually after many months, Eddie Teo was the Permanent Secretary by then, we managed to settle on the term, ‘an innovative and enterprising Civil Service’.  

At the same time, the Scenario Planning 2020 exercise led by the Strategic Planning Office under his charge convinced Yam that, “we needed to have a very innovative and enterprising Civil Service in order to be very nimble, very forward looking, future ready civil servants in order for us to position ourselves to deal with the challenges of the scenarios.”

The Civil Service College at that time included three units: IPAM, the Institute of Policy Development and the Civil Service Consulting Group. BG Yam recalled that they “were operating like four [sic] different departments, each had a department director

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67 David Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013;David Ma, email correspondence with Author, 16 Sep 2013.
69 Ibid.
Table 9.7: Public Service Division and Civil Service College, 1998

Permanent Secretary, Public Service Division
Lim Siong Guan

Deputy Secretary (Policy)
Lim Soo Hoon

Deputy Secretary (Development)
BG Yam Ah Mee

Personnel Policy Dept
Organisation & System Dept
IT Dept
PSC Secretariat
Personnel Guidance Unit

PS21 Office
Scenario Planning Office

Civil Service College

and they were all [receiving] Civil Service budgeting."\(^{71}\) Earlier differences between staff of IPAM and IPD lingered, the physical distance between the two separately-sited institutes not bridged by any collaborative opportunities.\(^{72}\) David Ma, Director IPAM, remembered that,

there was a bit of envy in a way that IPD’s income was guaranteed. Because of the AOs. As long as you have the AOs, as long as the government says we are going to train the AOs, then IPD. But the future of IPAM, not sure. Because if you don't have money, then you’re in trouble.\(^{73}\)

IPAM Training Officer, Ngiam Su Wei, added, “It’s a bit of a very strange situation, where it’s two sister-departments: one sister department is the one that served the \textit{elite} group and did all the high profile things; and then IPAM, left with the run-of-the-mill programmes and the ordinary folks.”\(^{74}\) A CSC-commissioned survey also found some agencies “not pleased or satisfied with IPAM’s provision of training courses.”\(^{75}\)

Such a Civil Service College, in the minds of BG \textit{Yam} Ah Mee, was not in synchrony with the PS21 goal:

the training arm, the development arm of the Civil Service…cannot operate like this. Because if the directors, trainers, administrators operated in a Civil Service context, almost like an iron rice bowl, how did you make sure your programmes were up to date, totally relevant, high quality, and kept abreast of the needs of the Civil Service and forward looking. So I felt that while we championed for PS21, scenario planning, we really needed to change the mentality.\(^{76}\)

At this juncture, Permanent Secretary Lim Siong Guan broached an idea he had been mulling over for some time with BG \textit{Yam}: replicating IPAM’s application of competition across the whole CSC. The motivation remained similar: compelling CSC to produce high-quality and relevant training programmes by detaching it from the Public Service Division, effectively cutting it off from the ministry’s funding. The risks between the two instances were different, though, as David \textit{Ma} explained:

with Inter Departmental Charging, that means we were still a government department. If … we really couldn’t survive, couldn’t make the ends meet, we would still go back to our bosses and say, ‘We have no money, help us.’ And if you are part of a department, I think they can’t say no to you. They may be very unhappy, but they will still have to bail you out, because you are a department.\(^{77}\)

\(^{71}\) Yam remembered that there were four units in CSC at that time; in fact, there were three, as listed in records of Parliament. Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011; Deputy Prime Minister, BG Lee Hsien Loong, “Civil Service College Bill”, \textit{Singapore Parliamentary Reports}, 25 Jul 2001, column. 1904.

\(^{72}\) Michelle Wong, Interview with Author, 24 Oct 2013.

\(^{73}\) David Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013.

\(^{74}\) Ngiam Su Wei, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.

\(^{75}\) This was a finding in the Gallup Organisational Poll Survey, 1996 - 1998. See Saravanan (2003) 42.

\(^{76}\) Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.

\(^{77}\) David Ma, Interview with Author, 8 Mar 2013.
Cutting the whole CSC adrift from PSD, on the other hand, would effectively remove any last resort to the Civil Service for help. In plain words, CSC would have finance itself, pay for its staff and overheads, by from the courses it would sell.

At the same time, without being constrained by the strictures of Civil Service regulations, CSC would have the flexibility to manage its own personnel according to its organizational needs. To allow CSC to produce quality programmes, it must be empowered to recruit trainers and staff with the necessary competencies and capacities, at the corresponding rates of remuneration. Correspondingly, in order to operate in a market environment, CSC should have the leverage to let-go of redundancies. Lim Siong Guan would elaborate afterwards:

The only way the Civil Service College can keep up with all the developments in the training and work marketplace is to co-opt competencies wherever they are found. …If you have a trainer who has been with you for 30 years but carries the same set of skills, you can’t bring in changes. So you need a structure that can bring people in and out – something which public departments can’t do.78

9.3.2 Public Sector Remaining the Focus

Yam Ah Mee was prepared to give it a try, despite Lim Siong Guan mentioning that "he asked a few people but nobody wanted to take up this change."79 Yam saw eye-to-eye with Lim that training played a critical role in supporting the PS21 reform:

when Mr. Lim, two-three months after I came in, said that we should operate like this, where people pay to attend [training courses], and the four units [of CSC] should earn their rights, earn their positions in the way they deliver quality, I said, ‘Yes, I was prepared to do this.’ … That’s where it got started, about two-three month after I came in, in 1998. Because I firmly believed that you really needed an innovative and enterprising Civil Service College in order to have an innovative and enterprising Public Service, so that we would be nimble enough for the future.80

While convinced that competition could draw out quality programmes from CSC, questions remained over the model to structure the training institution. One option was to completely privatise CSC, allowing market forces to ensure efficiency. But Lim, Yam and their senior management team were conscious that focusing on the lucrative private sector training market, which would necessarily result from privatisation, could lead to a void in the training of less profitable core public sector skills.81 A corporatized CSC would also lose its links to the government.82 Beyond the principles of competition

78 Lim Siong Guan, quoted in ST 12 Jul 2001: H7.
79 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
80 Ibid.
81 “An Interview with Chief Executive Officer and Dean, Civil Service College, BG(NS) Yam Ah Mee,” Ethos (Nov 2001): 4.
and efficiency, the ultimate goal of the exercise was to align CSC to produce training relevant for the development of a stronger Public Service. Moreover, remaining within the public sector would allow CSC to draw on some of the resources within the bureaucracy, such as senior civil servants as trainers. For these reasons, Lim, Yam and their senior staff agreed, CSC while separated from the Civil Service must still remain within the public sector.

The most optimal option, taking all into consideration, was to structure CSC as a statutory board. As an agency enacted by legislation specifically with the mission to carry out training for the public sector, CSC’s focus would not be distracted from training the Public Service. At the same time, set adrift outside the financial resources of the Civil Service would compel CSC to be market-driven, ensuring high standards in the development of its courses and programmes. The flexibility to operate at an arm’s length from the Civil Service, conferring CSC the flexibility to recruit the necessary competencies, would also boost its capacity to operate in an open market environment.

With the philosophical considerations worked out, Yam Ah Mee began plans to turn CSC into a self-financing statutory board. He convened an internal study into CSC’s financial situation; preliminary figures suggested that the Civil Service’s annual training and development budget was around $40 million, almost all of which was spent in CSC’s programmes. To ensure objectivity and independence in assessment, Yam engaged an external consultancy to conduct a comprehensive viability study. The evaluation by Ernst and Young, after a six-month study, confirmed that the total training demands of the Civil Service indeed amounted to about $40 million. The overall conclusion was that, if CSC could retain its existing customer base, proceeding with the self-financing model was feasible.

His confidence buoyed by empirical analyses, BG Yam proceeded with formal submissions. The exact justifications were still fresh in his mind a decade later:

I wrote a paper to form a restructured self-funded statutory board. I remember that the first question that was asked was: do we need CSC to be a statutory board? .... My arguments were: (1) we needed to be an innovative and enterprising Civil Service, therefore the training and development arm should first be innovative and enterprising; (2) if you really believe in being innovative and enterprising, then if the money came on a silver platter, you’ll never be very innovative and enterprising. So its best that we operate as a self-funded statutory board, so that you would not think there’s a grandfather behind, you have to earn the money.

83 An interviewee reported that original plans did not intend the CSC statutory board to be “self-financing”. Though this could not be verified by other sources, Lim Siong Guan apparently laid Yam Ah Mee the challenge for CSC to be self-financing six months before October 2001. Jaime Teong, Human Resource Manager, PSD, 1997 – 2001, Interview with Author, 21 Feb 2014.

84 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
9.3.3 Finding the Money

Although BG Yam Ah Mee was fairly confident that CSC’s courses could finance its operations, this source of revenue could only be available after the courses were delivered and invoices paid. In the interim, which Yam and his management team assessed to range between six and seven months, CSC needed an operating capital of $10.8 million.

While Singapore rebounded strongly from the 1998 regional financial crises, the economic outlook for the year 2001 was increasingly ominous. The 11 Sep suicide attacks on the United States worsened the already pessimistic sentiments; GDP contracted 2.2% and unemployment reached 6%. Against this outlook, BG Yam and his management team needed to convince bankers to extend a $10 million loan based on potential success of products yet to be sold, customers yet to be secured, and revenue that were still far from being clear. Approaching the DBS Bank, BG Yam recalled: “I had to show the bank the study we did with Ernst and Young: it’s quite doable, don’t worry. These are my programmes, we know what we do. This is the strategy. I had to give them a value proposition. So the bank supported us, I signed this.”

Joining Yam in signing the loan instrument from the bank was Eddie Teo. Teo had by then succeeded Lim Siong Guan as Permanent Secretary at the Public Service Division and would become chairman of the board of directors governing the proposed autonomous CSC. Even with his boss joining him in undertaking the loan, BG Yam could not help but felt the gravity of that decision: “after I signed the $10.8 million, the first three nights I actually didn’t sleep very well. This was the first time I borrowed $10.8 million and I knew that in 6½ months, about seven months, it would run dry, unless we did well. I really didn’t sleep well.”

9.4 CSC as Self-Financing Statutory Board

On 1 Oct 2001, CSC formally became a self-financing statutory board under the purview of the Public Service Division, in the Prime Minister’s Office (see Table 9.8). In the debate leading to the Parliament’s passing of the Civil Service College Act, two legislators while supporting the motion sought – and received – assurances that the CSC would keep civil servants across all levels of the personnel hierarchy abreast of

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86 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
87 Ibid.
Table 9.8: Civil Service College as a Statutory Board, circa 2001

Prime Minister's Office

- Elections Department
- Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau

Public Service Division

- Personnel Policy Dept
- Organisation & System Dept
- PS21 Office
- Scenario Planning Office
- IT Dept
- PSC Secretariat

Civil Service College

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Directory, Jul 2002: 1137-1151 and 1159-1165. Organisational units arranged left to right according to the sequence they were presented in the original documents.
Table 9.9: Civil Service College Organisational Structure, circa 2001

Dean & CEO
BG Yam Ah Mee

Institute of Policy Development
Mrs Rosa Daniel (Director)

Institute of Public Administration & Management
Mrs Tina Tan (Deputy Director)

CSC Consultants
Gavin Tan (Director)

Business Development
Gavin Tan (Director)

Corporate Development
Ms Jaime Teong (Director)

Finance
Ms Yu Chin Hsia (Director)

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professional developments. Opposition Member of Parliament, Chiam See Tong, argued that placing CSC under PMO could subject it to undue political influence. To this, Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, clarified that the Civil Service College was a “completely neutral outfit”:

It runs staff courses, courses for middle management, courses for senior management, courses on governance, courses on good English writing, courses on how to be a good civil servant….professional educational courses which need to be run for civil servants at all levels, from the top Permanent Secretary potential, all the way down to the clerical officer or the EO. So it is a completely neutral outfit.

9.4.1 Structure for Oversight and Control

While the CSC was established as a statutory board outside of the Civil Service, its organisational structure positioned it firmly under the control of the Public Service Division. The CSC Act provided for a Board of Directors to exercise independent oversight over the College but the designation of the Permanent Secretary (PSD) as chairman left no doubt that the predominant authority over CSC would remain with PSD. Up to 14 directors of the board could be appointed by the minister in-charge of the Civil Service, but without provision for these positions to be advertised meant that the selection process was managed internally, most plausibly led by the senior officials within PSD. The designated secretary of the board was the newly-established position of ‘Dean and Chief Executive Officer’ responsible for the College’s daily operations. With BG Yam Ah Mee, as Dean/CEO, concurrently Deputy Secretary at PSD, reporting to the Permanent Secretary, the management structure effectively entrenched the Public Service Division’s control over CSC.

To offer additional guidance to the CSC management team, a high-level Advisory Panel was appointed, led by Lim Siong Guan, by now promoted to the position of Head of the Civil Service. The panel also included two heads of foreign bureaucracies: Joseph Wong, Secretary of Hong Kong’s Civil Service, and Mdme Jocelyne Bourgon, President Emeritus of the Canadian School of Public Service and former Clerk of the Canadian Privy Council.

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The new CSC consisted of three main departments (see Table 9.9). The
Institute of Policy Development remained focused on the development of the
Administrative Service and leadership corps of the Public Service. IPAM's programmes
covered leadership, governance, public administration and PS21 initiatives. The Civil
Service Consulting Group and a Personnel Guidance Unit (PGU), transferred from
PSD, merged to form CSC Consultants.

The Personnel Guidance Unit was set up in 1996 when Lim Siong Guan was
Permanent Secretary to provide PSD with psychometric assessment capacity in
recruiting government scholars. According to Roger Tan, Assistant Head of PGU at
that time, PGU also helped statutory boards and government-linked companies in the
selection of job applicants, but these services were fee-paying for agencies outside of
the civil service structure.95 With all of its overheads funded from PSD’s budget, the
charging of fees-for-services introduced the principle of costs in services into PSD.
Significantly, this predated IPAM’s introduction of Inter-Departmental Charging in 1997.
Publicly, PGU’s inclusion into CSC added psychological consultancy to allow CSC to
offer integrated services.96 From the perspective of PSD, Tan pointed out, merging
PGU with IPAM, IPD and CSC Consultants also separated the service-provision units
to allow PSD focus as a policy-making ministry.97

9.4.2 Supporting Departments

A Business Development department was established to broaden CSC’s
customer base. Even Yam Ah Mee, as Dean/CEO facing pressing matters, had to
canvas for clients:

the business development marketing group, I joined them going round to talk to
permanent secretaries, talk to CEOs. …. And then we said we should also think
about going overseas for the Civil Service, to position Singapore on the world
map in the area of training and development. At that time we were doing work
in ASEAN countries, little bit in China. We should intensify and grow the ASEAN
countries.98

97 Roger Tan, Interview with Author, 18 Oct 2013.
98 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
While the initial aim was financial bottom-line, over time and with growing confidence, BG Yam seized the opportunity to use training for broader diplomatic goals.

in 2001 when we started the restructured statutory board, I went to Dubai, Bahrain, Qatar – I went to many places – Canada, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Australia, all over the place. I went to Dubai five times in one year, to make sure that all these things come through. I did a lot of travelling to engage. … Why? For the purpose of positioning Singapore on the world map in the area of training and development, in the area of training quality. 99

With the weight of financial viability weighing heavily over CSC, a Finance Department was set up within the College to keep a constant watch over money matters. In order to instill real-world competition and fiscal discipline into the organization, Yam deliberately refrained from sourcing from within the public sector when selecting the personnel to oversee finances.

I recruited a Director/Finance from outside, totally from the private sector. I said your role is to go through all these numbers, and make sure that from the finance angle, it’s a doable thing. Although I had a consultant who provided me their views, Ernst and Young, internally,[I had] my Finance Director, who was also Director/HR concurrently. … bearing in mind that I only started with six to seven months of rolling capital, we were very tight with resources, tight with people.100

9.4.3 Starting Out

Having laid out the preparations, the time came for the Civil Service College, modeled as a self-financing statutory board, to set forth into the market. The principal concern preoccupying BG Yam Ah Mee, Dean and Chief Executive Officer, and his senior management team and in fact all levels of staff in CSC, was undoubtedly financial. Yam set up a system to monitor operations and CSC’s performance:

we switched over. Every day when the courses finished, by the next day I already knew. I got my Finance, HR and operations side. I already knew: yesterday, how many people came for programmes? What was the feedback of the course, of the trainer? If we went like this, how much were the earnings? How much were the costs? I was going day by day tracking of quality, delivery, results, bottom-line.101

This tight feedback loop allowed Yam and his management to make decisions on the fly: whether adjustments were needed, what improvements to be made, etc.

Operating at such high intensity, especially after an emotional transition from government department to statutory board, was undoubtedly strenuous and exacting upon staff, from management to rank-and-file officers. Yam recalled that some CSC
officers had chosen to remain as civil servants when given the option when CSC restructured, rather than faced the uncertainty over CSC’s viability and their livelihoods:

Quite a number left on transition because they felt it was very tough to move from civil servant to restructured statutory board staff overnight. You now have to earn your income based on the quality of courses and programmes. The civil servants who [previously] must come to you now can go anywhere. You have to go and market, sell the product, convince the permanent secretaries, convince everyone, that my programmes were good. But everyone was looking at alternatives outside.  

Altogether, IPD and IPAM witnessed a reduction of 13 staff, from 138 before October 2001 to 125 after CSC became a statutory board.  

However, this was remembered differently by some at the staff level. Michelle Wong, a Course Administrator at IPAM at that time, recalled:

As one of the Division 1 graduates then, we weren't so much the affected ones, but I think it was the Division 2 and Division 3 officers, probably at that time more Division 3 officers, who felt it more. I think there was some unhappiness with how the transition was being communicated to them. Because it was basically something like, 'You go over [to CSC as a statutory board staff], then if you find that things are not suitable … you will be out of a job.' Somehow, maybe the way how the comms [communications] was handled, and I don’t know whether it was deliberate or not. So I think there was a feeling like job insecurity. And because of that, some people didn’t want to go over, and even those who remained there was some residual unhappiness about how the whole thing was being handled.  

Indeed, those responsible for personnel matters leading up to CSC’s change into a statutory board agreed the subject required delicate handling. Mrs Jaime Teong, Human Resource Manager at the Public Service Division, recalled that management’s preference was for all existing CSC staff to be “novated” into CSC statutory board officers when CSC changed its legal status. Yet, earlier expansion to meet the PS21 training demands had resulted in rapid rise in CSC staff numbers. IPAM, in particular, had a substantial number of personnel on temporarily hired terms. With the prospects of a self-financing CSC less than crystal clear, apprehensions over job-security were real among some CSC staff, especially those recently drafted into IPAM or whose competencies might not survive open-market competition. At several town-hall style dialogues aimed at assuring staff, senior PSD officials promised staff choosing to remain as civil servants, i.e. not transferring into CSC statutory board terms: they would not lose their jobs. But PSD, according to Jaime Teong, had difficulty securing

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102 Ibid.
104 Michelle Wong, Interview with Author, 24 Oct 2013.
105 Jaime Teong, Interview with Author, 21 Feb 2014.
positions in civil service agencies to emplace officers who chose not to transfer with CSC into statutory board terms.

In other recollections, staff chose to leave CSC not at the point of its becoming a statutory board but amidst the intense atmosphere thereafter. **Ngiam Su Wei**, by this time promoted to manager in IPAM, said:

the reason why people left, from my perspective, was more like: they looked at the new place, it no longer resonated with them, and therefore they left. Can’t blame Yam Ah Mee, he had to bring in private sector people, so he brought in private sector people, like Finance [director]. The way she [Director/Finance] operated was totally different from last time, maybe a more nurturing finance chief, or a more ministry way of doing things.\(^{106}\)

In the memories of some working-level staff, a highly demanding environment within CSC was emerging overnight: “we had to ramp up our capacity very quickly. It literally meant a sudden change of introducing different types of programs.”\(^{107}\)

More exacting was the sudden emphasis on meeting performance targets. Ms **Ngiam** recalled: “We were suddenly given targets that we had to achieve, and it’s in dollar amount…. you are accountable for your area, you have to grow your area, you have to bring in the targets… Suddenly we swing to the extreme of becoming profit-driven.”\(^{108}\) **Roger Tan**, Deputy Director of CSC Consultants, added,

when we became a stat-board, that time damn ‘jialat’ [‘very difficult’ in Chinese colloquial vernacular] and it didn’t help that the CFO [finance director] was so aggressive. Every meeting we were scolded upside down, kept being ‘pressurized’ to go for new money. So it was a culture shock for most.\(^{109}\)

For some among the staff, the acuteness and magnitude of the series of sudden changes to their environment could be tough to bear. One informant revealed that, one of the staff passed away. Don’t know whether [it was] because in the pursuit of numbers and profit, whether it causes the person to look at it, and then after that. I think it could be heart-attack. …. We heard his wife… [tapered off]. We heard that he every night would look at how to do better, how to bring in … [tapered off].\(^{110}\)

**Yam** Ah Mee received “many nasty letters who said that: why were we doing this? How come this Director/Finance from the private sector? It’s private sector

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106 Ngiam Su Wei, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.
108 Ngiam Su Wei, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.
109 Roger Tan, Interview with Author, 18 Oct 2013.
110 Informant 1, Interview with Author, 2013. Three other IPAM officers at that time pointed out that, notwithstanding the sentiments and grief felt by the wife of the deceased, the officer-concerned had come from a high-pressure working environment previously, and he might have existing medical conditions leading to his succumbing to a heart attack. Tina Tan, Interview with Author, 31 Oct 2013; Logendran, Interview with Author, 25 Oct 2013; Jaime Teong, Director, Corporate Development, CSC, 2001 - 2008, Interview with Author, 21 Feb 2014.
penetrating into Civil Service! Why everything needed to do double fast time?" 111 Some complaints reached “Mr. Lim Siong Guan [Head of Civil Service], went to Mr. Eddie Teo [Permanent Secretary, PSD], went even beyond that.” 112 The Minister in-charge of Civil Service then was Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who would obviously be aware of these developments. 113

Fortunately for Yam, the leadership – both the political leadership and top echelons of the bureaucracy – were prepared to hear him out. Not that he looked forward to these meetings under the circumstances: “I had to explain to Mr. Lim Siong Guan, Eddie Teo, many people: we were doing the right thing, it’s moving well. …we were doing this, I’m moving this part, I’m moving this part, I needed to move this part like this, so we operated like this.” 114 Yam and CSC were allowed to continue, at least for the time being.

Internally, Yam also had to manage CSC staff: “I had to tell my Director/Finance, ‘Slow down a bit, I know you are doing the right thing, but the approach cannot be rough.’” 115 Yam did remove the personnel management duties from the finance director’s portfolio. And, according to Jaime Teong whom the Dean brought in to take over HR functions, Yam considered letting go of the Director/Finance. 116 While he retained the finance director for the time being, Yam had to devote a lot of time engaging staff:

almost every month I had to do pep talk with our staff: ‘Don’t worry. We would show the results. Across, this was our overall performance; respective departments, this was your performance; this was feedback from our participants; this was our outreach to so many ministries and so many statutory boards; these were the new participants, local and overseas.” 117

Officers who were more senior in the hierarchy appeared more able to appreciate the measures within the context of CSC’s drive for survival. Manager, Logendran, pointed out that there was a prevailing “fear of the unknown, we were going into new area. Can we make it?” Hence every avenue was sought to reduce cost and maximize revenue because, “Survival was the word! …if your bottom-line was changed, breakeven was important, you must do x number of courses…. In fact we used to rent out our auditorium for the evening classes. Not for us, but for the private sector, just to

111 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
112 Ibid.
113 This was confirmed by Jaime Teong, Interview with Author, 21 Feb 2014.
114 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
115 Ibid.
116 Teong’s designation was Director of Corporate Development and included other functions. Jaime Teong, Interview with Author, 21 Feb 2014.
117 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
get the revenue.”

There were at least some officers within CSC who had greater level of confidence in the leadership team. One manager said,

We knew who the captain of the ship was and although we say there may be stormy waters, we were confident who the leader was, who was leading us. So I think the leader is very important. If they believe in it and they are there, they stand by us, we will have the confident that it (the change) will work. So I would say that there were risks involved, but I think if everyone put in their effort and everybody do [sic] their rowing and it means everybody has got to row and synchronise their rowing over the stormy days, at the end of the day we work as a team and that’s important to achieve the target we have before us.

As part of the autonomy vested in CSC, Yam linked staff remuneration to their performance. Foregoing the Civil Service formula of pay increments with years of service, CSC’s new framework pegged remuneration to outcomes:

First tier was how well Civil Service College overall performed? If we were in the red, I would say: so sorry I don’t pay you, I have no money to pay you at all. We went bankrupt, then we went bankrupt. We had to operate such that we operated together. This level we make sure we do well.

Tier No. 2 was by department. So even if we did very well, then I would break down into IPAM, IPD, CSCI. Because if your department did very well, I should recognize you even more compared to others.

Tier 3 is you as an individual, how did you do? Maybe IPAM did very well but you as an individual didn’t. Notice that all these three tiers were all tied to training development, mindset changes, delivery quality, training standards. But very line of sight – to individual, to team, to their department, overall.

Then the last tier, Tier No. 4, I needed everyone to have the right mentality, Civil Service ethos and values, PS21, improvement, innovation, continuous improvement, WITS, SSS [staff suggeston scheme]. So Tier 4 was about other areas not just to your training and your delivery.

So I had four tiers, every part of it was tied to how well we conceptualized, delivered, how innovative and enterprising, and what were our customers telling us, and the results.

As an organization in the training and development business, CSC also built learning and development into its personnel development plan. Training was positioned as staff entitlement, and higher learning offered as incentives. Well-trained staff, from the organization’s perspective, would expand its capacity.

9.4.4 Taking Stock

Evaluating public sector organisations is difficult – their level of success cannot be simply derived from the amount of revenues generated from their activities. The problem with assessing public sector organisations is principally over the complexity

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120 Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.
involved in quantifying public service; what cannot be measured is difficult to evaluate. Perhaps one approach is to assess CSC against the objective it set for itself.

When the Civil Service College transitioned into a self-financing statutory board, it aimed to provide high quality training that was relevant to the Public Service. The Dean/CEO was determined that CSC would succeed. The circumstances were far from conducive: the national economy contracted 2% and global outlook was greatly undermined by the 9/11 attacks.

Against this context, Yam Ah Mee recalled evaluating CSC’s performance after one year of operating as a self-financing statutory board:

the first year quite a number of ministries and statutory boards, assuming they used to come to IPAM so much, I saw that most of them, because they had a chance to try outside, they tried. Almost 50 – 60% they did with IPAM, the other 30 – 40%, some as much as 50% they tried outside in the first year.\(^\text{121}\)

While the picture appeared grim on the one hand, CSC’s efforts at broadening its customer base would prove rewarding. Following many rounds of canvassing, statutory boards which had previously not subscribed to CSC’s programmes and new government agencies were apparently won over by CSC. These new training deals together with overseas projects would prove a lifeline to CSC:

So in my first year the total revenue brought in was $43 million [Financial Year 2002]. In fact, for the three years, it was about $43 million [FY2002], $39 million [FY2003], $43 million [FY2004]. Beyond expectations.

The reason was that while we reached to the usual ministries, although they did lesser, we did more, we did local and overseas. And then I found that subsequent second year, they all came back. Because after they tried outside, then they said that outside not so customized, may not be so good. And the first year we had a net surplus of a couple of millions.\(^\text{122}\)

Yam’s greatest relief was the resolution of the cause of his many sleepless nights: “And within the first year I returned to DBS [Bank] $10.8 million, we paid back $10.8 million to DBS.\(^\text{123}\) And with the remuneration framework pegged to financial outcomes, CSC staff were “rewarded for all the hardwork.”\(^\text{124}\)

While CSC appeared to have achieved the fiscal independence aspect of its objective, Saravanan in his 2004 study questioned some of the financial figures:

When I thoroughly scrutinized the business resources of the CSC, I was informed that the CSC still receives funds from the PSO and the Managing For Excellence (MFE) office [both in the Public Service Division]. This funding amounts to about 15% to 20% of the total revenue of CSC. Thus, without the

\(^{121}\) Ibid.

\(^{122}\) Ibid; CSC 2001-03: 45; CSC 2003-04: 20; CSC 2004-05:36.

\(^{123}\) Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.

\(^{124}\) Ngiam Su Wei, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.
funding, the CSC’s current financial viability would not be as sound as it has claimed to be.125

This, Senior Manager Logendran explained, was part of the initial measures designed to cushion CSC’s migration to the full market; selected CSC programmes were “subsidised 50%, then 30%, 20% for five years.”126

Saravanan also questioned CSC’s proposition as a public sector organization: operating on the middle of the private-public spectrum will affect the strategic focus of any organization. The tension created by the need to balance both of the functions can take a toll on the organization. Important public service values and ethics such as accountability, integrity, responsibility and loyalty may be eroded by the competitive liberal private sector values. Thus, the durability of this model can only be seen with the passage of time.127

Saravanan might be right, except no empirical evidence was presented to substantiate these assertions. The difficulty in Saravanan’s thesis lays in the principal problem of quantifying public sector values and performance, as mentioned earlier.

Another approach is to evaluate CSC’s performance as a public sector organization against the rationale for retaining it within the public sector. The key reason, to revisit for context, was to ensure that CSC continued to provide training for the Public Service even as corporatization set it up to chase after the more profitable segments of the market. In fact, the reason for injecting competition into CSC was to compel it to develop high quality and relevant training, with the ultimate aim of providing these for the Public Service.

In this regard, CSC showed itself remaining focused on the public sector. Civil servants continued to attend CSC’s programmes, reflecting their ministries’ approval of CSC’s courses. Statistics listed in CSC’s annual reports in the immediate period after its conversion into a statutory board did not appear to show a digression into the private sector: there were no records of participants from outside the Public Service.128

Further evidence of CSC’s continued focus on the Public Service could be found in its overseas ventures. Profit would be the obvious motivation for such international projects but these represented a small percentage in proportion to CSC’s overall more domestically-oriented programmes. In 2002, for example, CSC undertook four foreign consulting projects while, apart from the already heavy focus on training

125 Saravanan (2003) 58-59. Efforts to locate Saravanan to corroborate these were unsuccessful.
128 In Financial Year 2002, for example, since all the participants for CSC courses were reported along their divisional strata, there were hence no indications of private sector participants. In FY2003, there were 1,700 “Others” among the rest of the 48,200 participants who were listed by divisional distribution. FY2004’s report indicated 1,773 international participants; the rest of the participants were civil servants. CSC 2001-03: 46; CSC 2003-04:18; CSC 2004-05: 35.
local civil servants, committed to 35 local projects.\textsuperscript{129} Even so, part of the reason for pursuing these overseas projects was evidently driven to serve and advance the interests of the Singapore Public Service:

We worked with UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], we worked with ADB [Asian Development Bank], we worked with CAPAM [Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management], we worked with ASTD [American Society of Training and Development]. Why? For the purpose of positioning Singapore on the world map in the area of training and development, in the area of training quality.\textsuperscript{130}

A more valid evaluation of CSC’s transformation, achieving financial self-sufficiency and remaining rooted in its Public Service-focus, was the high ‘cost’ upon its staff. Evidently, most staff were fatigued by the rapid ramping up of programmes and stressed by the sudden preoccupation with performance targets. The organizational culture, already far from cohesive with lingering differences between IPAM and IPD officers, became even more competitive and adversarial under the circumstances. Yet, this ‘cost’ might be inevitable in order to ‘unlock’ the full potential of the organization and its staff. Pointing to the doubling in output of some departments before and after CSC’s ‘stat-boardisation’, Roger Tan, reflected

if you look at it from the not-so-good point of view, it increased the workload tremendously. But if you look at it from another point of view, you might wonder how much spare capacity we had been harbouring in the old set-up, that there was hidden capacity there that we didn’t unleash…. The moment you turned it the other way around and say, ‘I’m going to pay you based on performance, I’m going to pay you based on whether you meet your KPIs, the more you earn, the more bonus you get.’ Straight away, human behavior changes and you can unleash, almost doubling. It’s quite a good illustration of how market forces can unleash all these sleepy government performance.\textsuperscript{131}

Several managers who had served longer stints in the central training school of the Public Service took a longer view of the CSC’s circumstances transitioning into a statutory board. Logendran, a manager who joined during the CSI period, said,

If you ask me, now looking back at it, I think sometimes you have to do some things which were not pleasant at the time, but it was the right thing to do. …if you are already given this mandate, you have to go ahead and do it. What were the options?\textsuperscript{132}

Mrs Tina Tan, who started her career with CSI, addressed criticisms that the focus on financial viability led CSC to lose its public sector focus:

People on hindsight said that, ‘We lost our way.’ But I don’t think so. …. You asked me to start a stat board [statutory board], you don’t give me the capital, I

\textsuperscript{129} CSC 2001-03: 44. No available data for subsequent years: CSC 2003-04; CSC 2004-05.

\textsuperscript{130} Yam Ah Mee, Interview with Author, 23 Dec 2011.

\textsuperscript{131} Roger Tan, Interview with Author, 18 Oct 2013.

\textsuperscript{132} Logendran, Interview with Author, 25 Oct 2013.
must make sure that everything can be paid for, including my staff’s salaries, I have to pay rental. So I must make sure that the ‘business’ is viable. But I don’t think we have deviated from the mission. We also did programmes that were needed by the people at that time. …to say that we had lost our way, I don’t think that was correct.  

Logendran continued,

if we had remained there [within the civil service structure], then honestly I think we may not be where we are now. Having gone through it, to me there is a very good lesson for us. Baptism of fire or whatever you can call it. I thought that having gone through it, it made us wiser and stronger, than if we continued to remain there, I’m not sure we will be where we are now. Because we have gone through it, we understood what we needed to do, what we needed to focus on.  

All other CSC officers interviewed for this study were in agreement that the intense focus on survivability at that time was necessary, despite the strain on staff, and laid the foundation for today’s Civil Service College.

9.5 Conclusion – A Stand Alone College

The transformation of the Civil Service College, from its establishment in 1996 to its transition into a statutory board in 2001, was a remarkably purposeful and well-planned alignment of training functions to support PS21 reforms in the Singapore Public Service. The eventual CSC was the result of decades of tinkering, rebadging, organizational restructurings – all representing attempts by the senior echelons of the Public Service to get the model they wanted. The decision to detach it from the Civil Service, from where the previous generations of training schools had all originated and been subsidiaries of, was effectively an implicit criticism of the erstwhile structure. But the training schools’ long-standing position as subsidiaries within the Civil Service meant that the task of detaching them would require deep deliberation and careful planning.

The conceptual framework overlaid the period in this chapter with sharp contextual focus. The promulgation of PS21 and the centrality of executive development and training in that reforms-drive did arise from within the bureaucracy. The Singapore Public Service, already efficient and operating at high-performance level, was seeking to leap for even higher bounds. Yet the state in the analytic framework continued to loom large. An even more efficient and effective Public Service would certainly held the electoral fortunes of the ruling PAP government, amidst much talk of development-democratisation theories at that time. Ultimately, even though Lim

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133 Tina Tan, Interview with Author, 31 Oct 2013.
135 Michelle Wong, Interview with Author, 24 Oct 2013; Ngiam Su Wei, Interview with Author, 9 Oct 2013.
Siong Guan might not have cleared the ‘reforms-through-training’ agenda with the political leadership, the political masters by withholding any objections for it, by tacitly endorsing it, and by approving budgetary allocations for it, was instrumental in supporting PS21 and CSC.

In retrospect, the eventual emergence of CSC as a self-financing statutory board, as the ultimate end-state of a series of restructuring, was clearly already conceived alongside the promulgation of the PS21 reforms. Between 1996 and 2001, each phase of CSC’s transition was an incremental but progressive step towards that final permutation. The two existing central training institutions were first merged into one central CSC to consolidate control over the bureaucracy’s training functions, in preparation of the subsequent phase of reorganization. This was the introduction of competition into IPAM, to push its staff to rapidly expand capacity, in order for the Public Service to realise the PS21 goal of offering public officers with 100 hours of annual training. On hindsight, this was clearly a trial, a controlled-experiment, for the follow-on replication of market-competition across CSC. Cutting CSC adrift from government funding, ‘empowering’ it autonomy to be responsible for its own finances, was the ultimate measure in compelling staff to produce or perish. Yet, by making it a statutory board anchored within the public sector ensured that CSC would continue to focus on relevance towards the Public Service. The emergence of CSC as a self-financing statutory board was thus the unfolding of a well-laid plan, five years in the making, like the coming-together of a patiently assembled set-piece on a chess-board.

Lim Siong Guan, the Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister’s Office and the architect of PS21, affirmed that the CSC’s restructuring was a purposeful alignment of the training institution to support the Public Service’s reforms. In an interview for this study, Lim recounted the strategy that was unfolding at that time:

The whole idea is very plain: Civil Service College is a critical node, it is a critical agency, for doing good for the whole Civil Service, on both counts, about the vision for the future of the country, and about knowledge and building experience and shaping the culture of the Service. I considered CSC as a critical instrument in shaping the culture and values of the Service. And therefore if there is any big change that you want to make in the Service, I consider the Civil Service College as the instrument for this.¹³⁶

Drawing on the CSC as that instrument for PS21 might have been convenient for Lim, since he oversaw CSC. But, more significantly, Lim recognised the importance of the Civil Service College as a dedicated agency to shape the bureaucracy through training:

Certainly this feeling that we needed an agency which saw its task as shaping the Civil Service. Any time you wanted to make a change, we could get people

¹³⁶ Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.
to go through the Civil Service College to imbibe these new ideas and approaches.\textsuperscript{137}

Another indication of this purposefully planned-out transition was the carefully pre-staging of key personnel. The appointment of Ms Lim Soo Hoon into the original Civil Service College by Lim Siong Guan, ostensibly to fill a routine vacancy of Deputy Dean, was really to position her for plans already charted out. Lim Siong Guan, as Permanent Secretary at the Public Service Division, was responsible for the movements of senior personnel across the bureaucracy. More significantly, Lim was the architect of the PS21 reforms movement. Within four months of her ‘deputising’, Ms Lim Soo Hoon would become Dean, succeeding Kishore Mahbubani who was ‘coincidentally’ promoted at this time. This allowed Ms Lim to consolidate the two central training schools into a new Civil Service College within a year. David Ma was another example of well-crafted personnel plans to facilitate organizational change. As head of the PS21 Office before taking over IPAM, Ma would naturally forge coherence between the training functions and the reforms movement. Brigadier-General Yam Ah Mee further amplified this positioning of key personnel into positions of influence, ready to carry out the various respective phases of moves on the chess-board. Critically, all these leaders, from Ms Lim Soo Hoon to David Ma to Yam Ah Mee, shared Lim Siong Guan’s conviction on the role of training in supporting PS21.

Lim Siong Guan, when asked how he was able to spot the right people to carry out the particularly fitting tasks, responded:

I’m not so sure that I spotted the right people. I tell you, fundamentally, my approach is not about spotting the right people. I think I have more strength taking the people that are available and bringing them to the point where they say, ‘This makes good sense! It’s exciting stuff to do! Let’s go get it done well!’ By and large, when we talk about Yam Ah Mee, David Ma, remember they are members of the Admin Service, they start with the intellectual capacity. What we need to draw upon is the emotional dimension, the sense of engagement of what I’m trying to do, which I find, no matter where I go, that if it’s an exciting idea, people are drawn in. And if you make them part of it and say, ‘I’m not giving you directions on this, but do you all agree this is where we want to go and this is what we want to become? If you agree, then carry on, what are your ideas? Let’s talk about it.’ And I find every place I go, people are motivated by this.\textsuperscript{138}

This highlights the importance of organizational leadership amidst this aligning of training for reforms, especially in defining and articulating the vision to the secondary layer of key personnel. Lim Siong Guan was evidently able to communicate his idea of PS21 to a large cross-section of the Public Service; the conviction manifesting through

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
Lim Soo Hoon, David Ma and Yam Ah Mee as they carried out each of their phases of change demonstrated the success of Lim Siong Guan – not only in articulating – but in securing a deep identification with the vision. The challenge, as it appeared in the case of CSC’s reorganization, laid in these secondary leaders breaking up the grand-strategic intellect of the vision into concrete clarity in order to assure rank-and-file staff preoccupied with actual operations and very real subsistence motivation. The case of CSC’s transformation amply demonstrated that leadership is key, not just at the broad strategic apex but at each and every level of the hierarchy, in order to carry through implementation.

Another notable feature of this aligning of training functions for reforms was the lack of reference to any foreign models. In the preceding years, the training schools had drawn on expatriate expertise to run programmes or studied overseas institutions like the British Civil Service College, France’s Ecole Nationale d’Administration and the Canadian Centre for Management in starting up training centres. The travails in Britain to keep the UK Civil Service College relevant and viable might have marked out the pitfalls to be avoided rather than offer lessons to be replicated. The distinct absence of any foreign influence in the restructuring of Singapore’s Civil Service College pointed to a progressive level of institutional maturity. CSC had plausibly ventured into uncharted waters: no foreign training institutions had attempted such an alignment of training functions to directly facilitate administrative reforms.

In fact, CSC’s transformation was rather inspiring for Hong Kong’s Secretary for the Civil Service. Joseph Wong, a top civil servant in Hong Kong overseeing the territory’s bureaucracy and invited to sit on CSC’s Advisory Panel during this time, was impressed by CSC. He recalled that, although CSC lost the monopoly over civil service training and had to compete with the private sector, it was able to finance itself. This, in Wong’s mind, was because CSC had “very clear targets” working towards financial self-sufficiency. The statutory board-status also helped by freeing up CSC from unnecessary red-tape and cumbersome regulation.

In contrast, Hong Kong’s Civil Service Training Institute (CSTI) – having evolved from its earlier nominal permutations – was at that time not conducting many courses of its own. Instead, by contracting out most of the training services to vendors in the private sector, CSTI was effectively a course secretariat or training broker for the Hong Kong bureaucracy. Joseph Wong, the most senior official responsible for Hong

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140 Joseph Wong, Interview with Author, 6 Sep 2013.
Kong’s civil service, while sufficiently impressed by Singapore’s CSC to muse modeling Hong Kong’s CSTI after Singapore’s CSC, nevertheless intimated that these options were constrained by Hong Kong’s particular context. Financial pressures within the bureaucracy resulted in the CSTI eventually absorbed into the Civil Service Bureau. In any case, Hong Kong’s political context at that time, Wong pointed out, meant that the government of the day, while having jurisdiction over the bureaucracy, did not have sufficient control over the legislature to extend to CSTI the statutory autonomy similar to CSC. In comparison, while Singapore’s CSC was granted autonomy to grow out of the civil service, Hong Kong’s CSTI in the same period lost much of its autonomy to become a smaller subordinate entity under its larger parent department. The political and bureaucratic context, in the analysis of Joseph Wong, divined the training institutions of Hong Kong and Singapore down different paths.

Finally, in evaluating the Civil Service College as a self-financing statutory board, challenging as it may be faced with the complexity of quantifying and measuring public services, the original objective had been achieved. CSC managed to remain financially solvent amidst the competition from the private sector training market. More significantly, this fiscal viability attested to the relevance of its training products, and with the overwhelming majority of its clientele being government agencies, a relevance that was focused upon the bureaucracy. With PS21 a continuous long term reform movement, the Civil Service College has truly become a focal point for introducing reforms into the Singapore Public Service.
CHAPTER 10
Findings, Analysis and Reflections: Explaining Singapore’s ‘Reform-through-Training’

Having examined five phases of executive development and training in the Singapore Public Service at the central level, this study now surveys the 40 years of evolution holistically. This chapter begins by considering the significant changes in executive development and training in the Singapore bureaucracy over time. It asks: what precipitating factors led to these shifts and why? And, amidst these regular changes, what can we identify as the continuities and defining characteristics of executive development and training of Singapore’s public officers? Finally, contemplating these four decades, what can we conclude as the Singapore model of executive development and training of its public bureaucracy?

10.1 Change and Continuity: 40 Years of Executive Development and Training

From the onset, the new Singapore Public Service contrasted sharply with the bureaucracy of the colonial era, and this sharp distinction shaped the character of executive development and training in the post-colonial Public Service. The colonial bureaucracy, as recounted in Chapter 4, was driven by the métropole’s directive to exploit Singapore’s location as a base for Britain’s Far Eastern empire at minimum operating cost. That political imperative determined the character of the bureaucracy administering Singapore. Not only was it small, to keep costs low, the colonial bureaucracy was bifurcated into a small British élite directing a broad swathe of locally-recruited, cheaper manpower to staff the rank-and-file appointments. With a singular focus on safeguarding the British military bases, unconcerned with local social or economic development, the colonial bureaucracy’s leadership was disconnected from the population and street-level bureaucrats largely indulged in petty corruption. Training in such a colonial bureaucracy was not a priority and perfunctory.

The Singapore Public Service at 1959, re-organised after 140 years as agents of the colonial era, was starkly unsuitable for the tasks of decolonization and self-government. The new locally-elected government found a bureaucracy steeped in colonial organizational culture and in need of reform. Chapter 5 pointed out that, against the broader context of state-formation, the emerging political élite – i.e. the People’s Action Party leadership – sought to consolidate their authority. Yet the colonial-era bureaucracy was not conducive for the PAP’s delivery of public services, the platform through which the PAP needed to secure electoral votes and its viability. The local population continued to see civil servants as aloof and rent-seeking. To
reform the Public Service, the PAP set up the Political Study Centre which, through the guise of training, socialized the leadership of the bureaucracy into a new appreciation of the nation-building milieu. As senior civil servants enjoined their political masters in shared interests, a symbiotic relationship emerged between the political leadership and the bureaucracy. With newly-socialised superiors tightening supervision, discipline across the bureaucracy also improved. The survival of the PAP government through internecine party struggles, merger with Malaysia, sudden independence and several elections was in no small part due to the Public Service’s ability to translate the PAP’s political visions into actual public services. That turn-around of the bureaucracy, from its politically disconnected and self-serving image, to one that was dependable to the regime, can be traced to the reforms introduced through the Political Study Centre.

The priority accorded to training the leadership élite highlighted the bifurcated system of personnel management and training and development. Chapter 6 pointed out that, with the bureaucracy pressed into an “economic general staff” to direct the capitalist developmental state in the 1970s, senior civil servants needed to quickly pick up in management skills. Evidently, the focus in every training initiative, whether the Political Study Centre, or the Staff Training Institute or later the Civil Service Institute, started with the élite Administrative Service leadership corps in mind. This emphasis on the élite was not a random or personal choice by this investigator; rather, this study reported the reality of the highly-selective Administrative Service cadre as a longstanding focus of the Public Service and the government. Training was focused on ‘training the leaders’ and cultivating leadership. Although the HR structure of a leadership apex presiding over all other staff across the base of the hierarchy was a colonial legacy, it was allowed to continue after independence (see Tables 10.1 and 10.2). A decade after self-government, for example, the number of Division 1 executive and professional positions had grown in proportion to the total establishment, from 4% to 7%. But the bureaucracy’s personnel structure remained pyramidal: a small Division 1 presiding over the supervisory, technical and manual grades forming the base of the hierarchy. Executive development and training, correspondingly, took on a bifurcated character.

The purpose in prioritizing the leadership élite was apparently to employ them, post-training, as spearheads of reforms across the bureaucracy. The productivity movement and computerization drive in the 1980s, as described in Chapter 7, demonstrated this modus operandi in action. In each instance, the Administrative Service officers were first trained up, in order for them – upon returning to their respective posts across the bureaucracy – to introduce and lead these reforms among the staff under their supervision. In this process, reforms were quickly cascaded down
and across the depth and breadth of the whole hierarchy. Hence, while every training initiative first targeted the leadership élite, this prioritization sought to equip them as spearheads to introduce and disseminate reforms across the whole Public Service.

Table 10.1 Personnel Structure of the Singapore Public Service, 1959

Table 10.2 Proportion of Civil Servants in each Division (Actual Numbers & Percentage), 1959 – 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Division 1</th>
<th>Division 2</th>
<th>Division 3</th>
<th>Division 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>28,253</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>4,628</td>
<td>9,841</td>
<td>12,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.25%</td>
<td>16.38%</td>
<td>34.83%</td>
<td>44.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>57,650</td>
<td>3,794</td>
<td>16,327</td>
<td>16,257</td>
<td>21,272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.58%</td>
<td>28.32%</td>
<td>28.20%</td>
<td>36.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Ibid; SAR 1969: 228.
Despite the leadership-priority, the dilemma between élite and broad-based training did tend to preoccupy the Singapore bureaucracy. As the training schools grew and began to institutionalize their presence, training programmes for all personnel across the hierarchy expanded amidst the prioritisation accorded the Administrative Service corps. So significant was the growth of broad-based programmes in the early 1980s that some among the Public Service leadership saw the Civil Service Institute becoming a school for the rank-and-file. Perhaps the lack of headway in parallel efforts to set up a staff college for the AOs sharpened the debate: Should resources be concentrated on developing talented leaders with pivotal roles over the bureaucracy, or should attention be evenly distributed among all officers to skill up the whole bureaucracy? The establishment of the Civil Service College in 1993, as addressed in Chapter 8, institutionalised the emphasis on executive development. But the hurry to transfer leadership programmes from CSI caused staff in the latter to see a hollowing out of their raison d’être. Such angst as an organisation, although unintended, nevertheless, had the effect of constantly engaging the bureaucracy – including its leadership – in contemplating the subject of training, and its use as a point of introducing reforms into the Public Service.

The Public Service for the 21st Century movement launched in 1995 was the epitome in harnessing the use of training to introduce reforms across the bureaucracy. As described in Chapter 9, this drive in the 1990s to improve public services was envisioned with training playing a pivotal role. Yet, skilling up public officers in functional competencies belied the more ambitious goal of PS21: to imbibe in public officers a lifelong quest for excellence and learning. For training institutions to lead this attitudinal socialisation, they had to undergo their own reforms of sorts. Key personnel were appointed over the training institutions to consolidate executive development and vocational training under a new Civil Service College in 1996. The injection of competition thereafter compelled CSC staff to attune themselves to the market and ensure that programmes were relevant to their public officer-clientele. The Civil Service College was thus oriented into a constant quest for relevance, becoming a fitting agent to lead the introduction of PS21 reforms of continuous change across the Singapore Public Service.

In sum, the use of training to socialise the leadership of the Public Service broke the bureaucracy from 140 years of colonial-era organisational culture and mindset. The focus upon training as a tool of reforms was itself a fundamental change from the neglect for training during the colonial period. The colonial legacy lingered in the bureaucracy’s personnel system, though; 10 years after decolonisation, the pyramidal HR structure of a small élite apex presiding over a large base of rank-and-file remained.
This personnel structure correspondingly determined the bifurcated character of training and development in the Public Service. The priority in training and grooming the leadership élite, a continuity in the 40 years under investigation, was a function of its role in spearheading change and adaptation across the bureaucracy, another constant in the period. Above all, amidst the changes in various training initiatives in the course of these four decades – whether these be re-naming the training institutions or changing their organisational structures – the enduring constant was to ensure that executive development and training remained relevant to the operating milieu of the bureaucracy.

10.2 Agents of Change

The first phase, employing training to socialise the leadership levels of the bureaucracy, was evidently initiated by the political masters. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, deputy premier Goh Keng Swee and various other ministers were actively involved in conceptualising the Political Study Centre, drawing up its curriculum, and even in leading its training programmes. In 1995, the Public Service was by then completely responsible for its training and reforms agenda. Lim Siong Guan, the permanent secretary in charge of the Public Service, was able to launch the Public Service for the 21st Century initiative – harnessing training and development to pursue that reforms drive – without clearing it with the political leadership. Between the first phase spanning 1959 to 1969, and 1995, there was no evidence from the data examined that the political leadership was itself as actively involved in the bureaucracy’s subsequent training as it was initially with the Political Study Centre.

One exception was in 1979 when the Prime Minister changed the name of the training institution. Yet, the very intervention suggested that Lee Kuan Yew was not involved, not consulted, in the setting up of that institution. This indicated that the political leadership had granted some degree of latitude, certainly adopted a more ‘hands-off’ stance since the first phase, for the bureaucracy to run its own training. Another notable episode occurred in 1991 when then-Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of political acumen among civil servants in formulating and implementing public services. This might be one of the reasons leading to the subsequent establishment of the leadership development institute. But, at the same time, it certainly pointed to a similar ‘hands-off’ latitude by the political leadership towards how the bureaucracy run its training. Hence, while the ‘reforms-through-training’ agenda was initiated by the political leadership in the first instance,
this agenda was over time handed over to the bureaucracy, with the political masters intervening only when the bureaucracy was adjudged to require specific direction.

But in Singapore, there was no single individual or group in the bureaucracy that can be identified as leading the executive development and training trajectory or reform agenda. Even as the bureaucracy gradually assumed leadership of its ‘reforms-through-training’ agenda, there was no evidence among available records suggesting any extraordinary role among civil servants in shaping this enterprise. Lim Siong Guan was an exception, prominent in driving the Public Service for the 21st Century movement and its advocacy of strategic training. That aside, accounts in the preceding chapters showed that senior officers with responsibilities for training, over the course of the 40-year period, went about their assigned duties, unremarkable in their routine professionalism. From permanent secretaries and directors of training institutes providing leadership, to trainers designing and delivering programmes, to staff supporting training activities with administration and logistics, they carried out their responsibilities in the Westminster tradition of a professional bureaucracy. All the officers interviewed for this study stressed that they were part of a team, a collective that drove reform, efficiency, effectiveness and integrity. None attempted to take personal responsibility or ‘glory’ for initiating or driving reform changes at particular junctures. Thus, mundane as it might be, even as the Public Service took over the mantle of the ‘reforms-through-training’ drive, it did not arise from the particular efforts of any individual officer. The use of executive development and training to reform the bureaucracy was the result of the collective and routine industry of all civil servants involved, carrying out their responsibilities professionally in the Westminster tradition.

So how might these changes in the leadership of the ‘reforms-through-training’ agenda be explained - from domination by the political leadership to improved management and strategic leadership by the bureaucracy? What was the significance attached to executive development and training in the Singapore political system and bureaucracy? The objective in the first phase, using training for political socialisation of the bureaucracy, was evidently to produce a Public Service that was reliable. In the eyes of the political leadership against the context of state formation, civil servants needed to be loyal – as opposed to remaining steeped in their colonial-era organisational culture – in order for the nation-building programmes to be carried out. When the bureaucracy proved dependable over time, the training agenda turned towards competency-building. In part, this was necessitated by Singapore’s drive towards a capitalist developmental state. More importantly, the political masters had shifted their attention away from political socialisation, and towards the economic underpinnings of Singaporean society, because by the 1970s they had sufficiently
consolidated their authority. In any case, the turn towards growing civil servants’ functional competencies in management training, finance, human resource management, language and communications, etc. was obviously directed at building up a more capable Public Service, which in turn would facilitate the electoral viability of the political élite. Far from gratifying particular political parties or personalities though, this build-up of the Public Service’s neutral competency allowed it to carry out its work of governing with greater efficiency and effectiveness. Executive development and training, thus, served to gear up the bureaucracy to pursue and carry out the course of action as the executive agent of the elected government of the day.

This perspective also acknowledges that the relationship between the political masters and the Public Service swung from close alignment to disconnectedness from time to time. Both PAP leaders and senior civil servants beheld one another with apprehension at the threshold of decolonisation in 1959. The political masters, through socialisation at the Political Study Centre, reoriented civil servants to the PAP worldview. After working together to pull Singapore through the developmental phase in the 1970s and 1980s, Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong’s complaint of the Public Service losing political sensitivity hinted at a gap in the political-bureaucratic partnership. This account seems to suggest a swing between connectedness and disconnectedness in the bureaucracy’s relationship with the political leadership.

Yet, from the viewpoint of the PAP, as the political masters who have received the electoral mandate by virtue of the Westminster system of government, the bureaucracy was an instrument to carry out that mandate. The question was not one between connectedness and disconnectedness. Rather, it was directing the Public Service to carry out the will of the government of the day, by persuasion where possible but by imposition of the government’s authority if need be. Most evident was the socialisation thrust upon the bureaucracy, but the Political Study Centre also helped senior civil servants appreciate that their interests lay with the PAP leadership. This nexus of interests between the PAP government and the leadership of the Public Service helped lead Singapore through the developmental phase in the 1970s and 1980s. When the bureaucracy ventured to pursue PS21 ‘reforms-through-training’ at its own initiative, facilitating the government in realising its policies and programmes, the political masters supported the Public Service.

A direct relationship can thus be discerned between the amount of trust shown by the political masters for their bureaucracy on the one hand, and the latitude they allowed the bureaucracy to pursue its ‘reforms-through-training’ agenda. The greater the ability of the bureaucracy to inspire the confidence of the political masters, the more
prepared the latter to grant the bureaucracy discretion to pursue its reforms. Conversely, the political leadership that was distrustful towards civil servants would be more inclined to rein in the bureaucracy. While some scholars thought that in systems where “politicians and bureaucrats are ‘interlinked’, the capacity for administrative reforms goes down,”3 the close partnership between political masters and civil servants in Singapore facilitated, rather than inhibited, reforms in the bureaucracy.

Table 10.3 A Heuristic Chart Suggesting the Relationship between the Political Leadership and the Bureaucracy

10.3 The Central Location of Training & Development in the Bureaucracy

The central location of the training institutes within the Singapore Public Service is noteworthy and an indication of the importance accorded to executive development and training. When the locally elected government took over from the British colonial authorities in 1959, the bureaucracy it inherited included the Staff Training Centre located within the Ministry of Finance. As the Political Study Centre was drawing upon the resources of the Staff Training Centre at its infancy, it was also set up, alongside the Staff Training Centre, within the Establishment Division of the finance ministry. The training function, like most bureaucracies across the world, was part of personnel matters; manpower, in turn, was regarded as resources to be planned and allocated, and thus housed within the finance portfolio. And there in the Ministry of Finance the subject of training and development resided for 20 years, as the Staff Training Institute and the Civil Service Institute subsequently.

The creation of the Public Service Division in 1983 signalled increasing attention to personnel management, including the subject of training and development. The Civil Service Institute came under the jurisdiction of PSD in this reorganisation. Yet, for the time being, PSD remained a subordinate unit under the oversight of the Ministry

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of Finance; training and development – and personnel matters – continued to be regarded as resources to be centrally managed. Nevertheless, the establishment of the PSD as a distinct organisational entity pointed to increasing attention paid to personnel matters, including the subject of training and executive development.

The growing importance of personnel matters in the Singapore bureaucracy culminated in the reorganisation of the Public Service Division into a full-fledged ministry in 1994. The central training institutes – at that time, the Civil Service Institute and the Civil Service College⁴ – together with the other constituent departments of the PSD came under the direct jurisdiction of the Prime Minister’s Office. The eventual separation of the consolidated Civil Service College from the bureaucracy into an autonomous statutory board, while seemingly a distancing from the bureaucracy, did not in reality dilute the College’s central location within the Public Service: the CSC remained under the oversight of the Prime Minister’s Office through the PSD.

Training and executive development, therefore, had over the 40-year period studied in this thesis gravitated from the centre of government further inwards to be even closer to the locus of executive policy-making. This trajectory further into the centre, while part of the growing importance attached to personnel and establishment matters, indicated the increasing attention devoted to the subject of training and development in the Singapore government.

10.4 Overseas Exemplars

The 40 years of evolution in executive development and training of the Singapore bureaucracy (1959 – 2001) was remarkable in its domestic initiatives and the negligible foreign influence. This study has drawn on several bureaucracies in other jurisdictions to contrast and sharpen the features of the Singapore case but the Singapore Public Service did not seek to simply replicate any of these overseas counterparts. Several study trips were made to the British Civil Service College at various times in the four decades but there was no evidence that Singaporean officials sought actively to model their training initiatives after the British institution. This is noteworthy considering that Britain was the colonial master and the relatively lack of experience with training in the Singapore bureaucracy following decolonisation. The interactions and even collaborations with training institutions in other jurisdictions, such as Malaysia and Hong Kong, were also more general exchanges of ideas, networking and as part of broader furtherance of diplomatic relations.

⁴ This was the leadership development centre, renamed the Institute of Policy Development in 1996.
Academic institutions, in comparison, featured more prominently, but only just, in the early phases of Singapore’s executive development and training. The University of Southern California, sponsored by the Asia Foundation, dispatched a few academics to run leadership programmes for the Singapore bureaucracy in the 1970s. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, INSEAD, at the behest of the French government, headed proposals for an administrative staff college for Singapore. Both initiatives had limited effects – the American measure was a stop-gap while the French effort was inconclusive. A key concern, perhaps, was to limit the influence of foreign governments upon the bureaucracy, especially when both overseas ventures were funded by their home governments.

The overseas exemplar that was purposefully studied by Singapore was the Canadian Centre for Management and Development. When Singapore decided to establish a dedicated leadership development centre in the early 1990s, officials set their sights on the CCMD. The use of case studies and other curricular design at the eventual Singapore Civil Service College drew much inspiration from the Canadian bureaucracy’s training school. Peter Ong, who visited CCMD in planning the Singapore CSC, was especially impressed by Canada’s use of training to forge networks for inter-agency coordination among public service leaders. Whole-of-government coordination was to become a particularly prominent theme in the Singapore Public Service.

Even so, the Canadian exemplar was not replicated wholesale into Singapore; Singapore drew on ideas that were practicable for its circumstances and adjusted these to suit its context. Indeed, a key feature in Singapore’s development of its executive development and training for the bureaucracy was eschewing the ideological or theoretical models for a pragmatic quest for what-works. Even when overseas training institutions were leading models in their own jurisdictions or internationally, such as Ecole Nationale d'Administration, the holy grail of public sector training, Singapore selected aspects that were relevant and applicable, and adapted these to fit into its contextual requirements.

10.5 A Singapore Model of Executive Training?

10.5.1 ‘Punctuated Equilibrium’ Model

Surveying this 40-year evolution of ‘reforms-through-training’ in the Singapore Public Service, what model did Singaporeans develop? Was the Singaporean model designed to deliver ‘more of the same’ where executive development and training
simply grew in volume and quality but remained largely the same in content and delivery? Or were there deep and real changes in the evolution of executive development and training in the Singapore Public Service?

The first proposition is certainly not persuasive. While the training programmes did grow in numbers and sophistication, the objectives of the training initiatives through the years changed dramatically. The initial goal of socialising the bureaucracy into a loyal and reliable Public Service quickly gave way to the objective of setting up an ‘economic general staff’ to manage the developmental state. With the Public Service achieving its neutral competence by the 1990s, the goals of the Public Service for the 21st Century initiative – building capacity for continuous change – were remarkably different. Far from the efficiency and effectiveness for the present, PS21 was casting for the future. Thus the Singapore model was certainly not ‘more of the same’.

From their flow and rhythm weaving through the preceding chapters and the whole thesis, the changes in the Singapore bureaucracy’s training initiatives were episodic and suddenly intense amidst certain periods of stability and consolidation. Following the dramatic events that were the PAP government’s assertion of control over the Public Service after decolonisation, the first phase of political socialisation lasted 10 years. Recognition of a gap in management skills within the Public Service to oversee the capitalist developmental state resulted in the competency-building period spanning some two decades, before the future-oriented PS21 came to the fore. More significantly, each of these changes in training initiatives was heralded by shifts in the broader institutional contexts: competency-building to gear up for the developmental state, and PS21 in preparing the already-efficient bureaucracy for future unknowns.

Such a phenomenon of episodic and fundamental changes amidst periods of continuity in the evolution of executive development and training in the Singapore Public Service draws comparison with the ‘punctuated equilibrium model’. Baumgartner and Jones developed the model to explain the dynamics of policy-making in the American political system. Yet, some of the characteristics in their model resemble aspects featuring in the current subject of discussion. This ‘punctuated equilibrium model’ is thus ‘borrowed’, like a conceptual metaphor, to help articulate the evolution of training in the Singapore bureaucracy.

Similar to the ‘punctuated equilibrium model’, training in the Singapore Public Service can be seen as largely characterised by “long periods of stability … interrupted by [episodic] burst of frenetic policy activity.”6 As in the model by Baumgartner and

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Jones, much of the stability and changes in the Singapore bureaucracy’s training initiatives can be traced to institutional cultures.\(^7\) The dictates of political masters within the broader political system accounted for much of the episodic and sudden changes in training initiatives, most memorable of which was the Prime Minister’s personal intervention to change the name of a training school. The extended periods of stability in training initiatives thereafter can be attributed to the ‘stasis’ tendency of the bureaucracy. Civil servants instinctively seek to work out the course of policies to their fullest, abiding by existing directives and processes, rather than actively reviewing and seeking change. Naturally, a theory designed for American policy making cannot lend itself to fully explain training in the bureaucracy. In as much as it helps to articulate the phenomenon highlighted in this study, the Singapore model of executive development and training as pursuit for reforms is very similar to a model of ‘punctuated equilibrium’.

10.5.2 Sequential State Needs Model

Taking another analytical view of the four decades in the evolution of executive development and training in the Singapore bureaucracy, a second explanation can be discerned. In the course of this 40-year period, the state emerged from the onset of decolonisation as the principal actor: it defined the interests of state, it set the order of priorities, and it mobilised and employed all resources at its disposal – including the bureaucracy – to pursue these goals.\(^8\) Seen from the perspective of state-centric actor, the Singapore bureaucracy’s progression from basic training after decolonisation to higher-order and more sophisticated executive development and training in the 1990s further resembles the graduating hierarchy of needs posited by Maslow.\(^9\)

At the threshold of state-formation in 1959, the first priority pertaining to the Singapore Public Service – as far as the emerging political élite was concerned – was ensuring that it was loyal and dependable. As detailed in Chapter 5, the newly-elected People’s Action Party government found a bureaucracy mired in colonial-era organisational culture, even hostile to the new nationalist government. Viewed through the prism of state-formation or state-centric theory, the immediate consolidation of authority by the new PAP élite targeted the bureaucracy. The loyalty of the Public Service had to be turned from the preceding colonial authorities towards the new state and its elected political masters; the values of the bureaucracy needed to change from

\(^7\) Ibid xx.

\(^8\) Theda Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research,” *Bringing the State Back In*, eds., Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9-11.

colonial-era culture towards incorruptibility and service towards citizens and the new state. This first priority of creating a dependable and reliable bureaucracy was pursued, and largely accomplished, through political socialisation in the first decade of self-government.

The second-order need, thereafter and alongside Singapore’s progression into a capitalist developmental state, was to equip the Public Service with the technical competencies to perform and carry out the government’s mission. As covered in Chapter 6, when Singapore turned towards rapid state-led industrialisation in the 1970s, the focus of training shifted from political socialisation to equipping senior civil servants with management skills. This shift in focus soon broadened into an expansion of the whole range of administrative competencies, ranging from financial procedures and personnel management to writing and communication. By the 1980s, the Civil Service Institute was able to emerge as a key training arm of the Singapore Public Service because it was able to offer a whole range of programmes for the training of almost all the officers across the bureaucracy and up-and-down its hierarchal strata. This institutionalisation of the CSI, as described in Chapter 7, signalled the fulfilment of the second-order priority.

When the Singapore Public Service was widely acknowledged to be efficient and effective, even as the state matured into a developed economy, the next order of priority was to develop a strategic capacity. By the early 1990s, the bureaucracy had established various structures and processes to ensure competent and effective design and delivery of policies and programmes. When it then launched the Public Service for the 21st Century reforms initiative, the intention was to turn the bureaucracy’s orientation outwards and into the future. PS21’s goal to prepare civil servants for long term future uncertainties and developments, i.e. to be anticipative of change, and to be responsive to changes in its operating environment, was a shift away from mere efficiency and effectiveness. This build-up of strategic capacity was evidently a distinct progression from the earlier order of needs into the next higher order of priority.

This evolution in executive development and training in pursuit of reforms, from creating a loyal and incorruptible bureaucracy, to one with the competencies to administer efficiently and, finally, to a Public Service with a future-oriented strategic capacity, followed a path of sequential state needs. The Singapore bureaucracy was almost subscribing to a systematic progression, addressing basic and immediate imperatives at the outset, before escalating to higher-level concerns, in an orderly step-by-step basis, before casting for longer term aspirations. The Singapore model, therefore, exhibited the characteristics of a strong state model addressing the
sequential needs and priorities of the state actor interested in rapid social and economic development.

10.5.3 Training-Reform-Modernisation Trajectory?

A larger question that arises when taking stock of this whole period: did training result in reforms of the Public Service which in turn led to Singapore’s modernisation? The empirical data lined up in this study points out that executive development and training did contribute towards the reforms of the Singapore Public Service, but the study also showed that training was only one of the contributory factors. In the state-formation period, for example, the re-orientation of the bureaucracy from the colonial organisational culture was pursued – apart from socialising the leadership – by a combination of measures: campaign against corruption, tightening of disciplinary regulations and bridging civil servants’ disconnect with citizens by compelling them to undertake public work. Efficiency drives such as productivity and computerisation, while aided by training, were in themselves measures that improved the reliability and performance of the Public Service. At the same time, adjusting the remuneration of civil servants in the face of heightening competition for manpower in the booming economy helped retained talented officers to lead and implement reforms across the Public Service.

Similarly, although a more efficient and high-performing Public Service contributed towards the modernisation of Singapore, the bureaucracy was one among many factors in Singapore’s success. The political vision of Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP leadership, while needing implementation by the bureaucracy, was certainly critical in laying out the strategic goal in transforming the colonial outpost into the vibrant city-state that is today’s Singapore. The political will in pressing the citizens together in pursuit of economic development, overcoming dissent and opposition, helped provided Singapore with the resources to finance comprehensive social development and reinvestment in further economic development.

These are all factors the study refrained from belabouring in light of limitations in time and space, and with the focus of the dissertation on executive development and training. In sum, executive development and training certainly contributed to the reforms of the Public Service, and a more efficient and high-performing Public Service with high integrity certainly helped the modernisation of Singapore, but there are other contributory factors at the same time.
10.6 Framework for ‘Reforms-through-Training’

In examining the use of executive development and training as a point to introduce reforms across the Singapore Public Service, the conceptual framework drawn up at the beginning of this study has proven useful. The framework was designed to anchor the study in its various contexts: while charting the evolution of training over 40 years, at the same time examine the dynamics of the body politic, economy, society and the bureaucracy upon the subject of executive development and training (see Table 10.4).

Table 10.4 Conceptual Framework

This framework has further helped identify factors facilitating the use of training in reforming the Public Service. The political leadership’s consistently strong support was the most crucial factor in Singapore’s use of training to spearhead reforms in the bureaucracy. The People’s Action Party leadership, upon their election to government in 1959, first started using training as a platform to socialize the senior officers of the bureaucracy. Subsequent training initiatives might arise from within the bureaucracy, from management training in the 1970s to productivity in the 1980s, but they owed their existence to the acquiescence of the political leadership. As projects financed by public money, they required the prior approval of the cabinet, not just the ministers overseeing the bureaucracy but also ministers whose portfolios sought funding from the same budget. Even when Lim Siong Guan attested that PS21 “was never cleared with the political leadership, because I saw the improvement of productivity and efficiency in the
civil service as the responsibility of the civil service leadership, “the location of the Civil Service College and Public Service Division within the Prime Minister’s Office meant that the ‘reforms-through-training’ programme must have received the prior blessing of the most senior-ranking political master. Consistently strong support of the political leadership provided the budget which sustained these reform-through-training initiatives.

High economic growth over the years provided the necessary wherewithal to finance executive development and training as recourse for reforming the bureaucracy. To be sure, the budget for civil service training was never extravagant in relation to the overall expenditure of the state. But as the country’s coffers deepened following years of sustained economic growth, the amount of money devoted to the bureaucracy’s training in absolute terms increased exponentially. Hence, while the training expenditure remained less than 0.1% of the national budget between 1959 and 2001, the actual dollar value of the training budget grew from a mere S$53,920 (A$46,087) to S$24.5 million (A$21 million) during the same period. This meant that, even as the size of the bureaucracy increased, the amount of money invested in training each individual public officer grew from S$1.80 (A$1.54) in 1959 to S$3.71 a decade later, to S$16.41 in the 1980s, to S$43.13 in 1990. By 2000, the training dollar per public officer had reached S$234 (A$200) (see Table 10.5). This latter figure compares very favourably with other international jurisdictions.

Table 10.5 Training Expenditure in relation to National Budget, 1959 – 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total National Government Expenditure</th>
<th>Total Civil Service Establishment</th>
<th>Training Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>$274,314,430</td>
<td>29,900</td>
<td>$53,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>$1,024,893,580</td>
<td>64,229</td>
<td>$238,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$7,635,000,000</td>
<td>69,226</td>
<td>$1,135,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>$14,135,000,000</td>
<td>108,939</td>
<td>$4,699,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$28,994,000,000</td>
<td>121,637</td>
<td>$28,536,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison, the training budgets of other bureaucracies were much lower. In 2000, the Australian Commonwealth government set aside just A$3.938 million for the

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10 Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.
11 Budgetary allocations for the respective training institutions (Political Study Centre, Civil Service Institute and Civil Service College) during each period, except for the year 1969. For 1969, budgetary allocation was for the Training & Organisation Division comprising the Political Study Centre, Staff Training Centre and the Organisation & Methods Branch; data excluded allocations for O&M. Data drawn from SAR and Budget 1960 – 2001. Table tracks training expenditure every 10 years, where information is available.
development and training of all 113,322 officers of the Australian Public Service.\textsuperscript{12} This amounted to a training budget of A$35 per officer (see Table 10.5). In Hong Kong, HK$160 million (A$22 million) was allocated for the training and development of a total establishment of 198,605 civil servants.\textsuperscript{13} This translated to a training budget of HK$805 (A$110) per officer. Although three times that of the Australian figure, this is still half the budget committed to training the Singaporean public officer.

Table 10.6 Civil Service Training Expenditure in Selected Jurisdictions, 2000 *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Total Establishment</th>
<th>Training Expenditure</th>
<th>Total per staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>121,637</td>
<td>SGD 28,536,700</td>
<td>AUD 24,386,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>113,322</td>
<td>AUD 3,938,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>198,605</td>
<td>HKD 160,058,000</td>
<td>AUD 21,975,675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Malaysian data in Malay language; UK data not available

Social development, also benefitting from the rapid economic growth, further facilitated training through reforms. Improvements to general standards of living inevitably raised the quality of human capital available to the Public Service. Specifically, rising educational levels altered the traditional structure of the personnel hierarchy: The proportion of Division 4 posts (manual, unskilled grades requiring little or no formal education) shrank from 45\% of the establishment in 1959 to 37\% a decade later (see Table 10.7; compare Table 10.8 with Table 10.1). In contrast, the number of Divisions 1 and 2 tertiary-educated executive and professional staff increased from 20\% in 1959 to 35\% in 1969. By 1976, the proportion of Divisions 1 and 2 officers had grown to 44\% of the civil service workforce; conversely, Division 4 officers constituted only 23\%.\textsuperscript{14} Today, highly-educated administrative and executive Division 1 officers constitute more than 50\% of the total establishment, while only a small 4.5\% remains in Division 4. Rising educational levels among the Singaporean population, funded by a steadily growing economy over the years, allowed the bureaucracy to expand its executive and professional staff, and develop its leadership and long-term strategic capacity. With most public officers thus able to access knowledge and learning, the


\textsuperscript{14} SESL 1976: 7. Records ceased to breakdown the staff numbers according to Divisions from 1976.
‘reforms-through-training’ agenda could be pursued with greater ease, shorter timeline and possibly more effective outcomes.

Table 10.7 Proportion of Civil Servants in each Division, 1959 and 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Division 1</th>
<th>Division 2</th>
<th>Division 3</th>
<th>Division 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>28,253</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>4,628</td>
<td>9,841</td>
<td>12,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.25%</td>
<td>16.38%</td>
<td>34.83%</td>
<td>44.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>80,128</td>
<td>44,631</td>
<td>26,202</td>
<td>5,689</td>
<td>3,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55.70%</td>
<td>32.70%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.8 Personnel Structure of the Singapore Public Service, 2013

Finally, the bureaucracy’s ability to inspire confidence as an institution of the state allowed it to pursue its reforms agenda through executive development and training. Reforms through the Political Study Centre were initiated by the PAP government at self-government, largely to change the colonial era organisational culture of the bureaucracy but also, to show civil servants ‘who’s boss’. But the political masters’ initial distrust for the bureaucracy gradually ebbed and, over time, turned into confidence as the reformed Public Service delivered the policies and services that strengthened the PAP’s credibility with the electorate. By the time the Civil Service College was marshalled to introduce PS21, the bureaucracy was demonstrating,

beyond its capacity for efficiency and effectiveness in delivering public services, a growing sophistication in training and reforms. More significantly, the latitude granted the bureaucracy to pursue its ‘reforms-through-training’ agenda, without having to clear the PS21 initiative with the political leadership, for example, reflected the political master’s trust in the Public Service as an institution of the state.

10.7 Summing Up

This chapter has taken the opportunity, after studying five successive phases of executive development and training in the Singapore bureaucracy, to analyse the whole 40 years of evolution as a distinct entity. In evaluating across the change-continuity spectrum, the introduction of training as a tool of reforms in the Singapore Public Service in 1959 clearly broke with the colonial bureaucracy’s neglect for training. More significantly was the enduring continuity across the four decades: the role of the Administrative Service leadership élite to spearhead reforms across the bureaucracy and, most important of all, the constant quest for executive development and training to keep the bureaucracy relevant to the operating milieu.

The principal agent of change throughout the period was the political masters who, by virtue of the Westminster system of government, regarded the bureaucracy as an instrument to carry out the mandate of the government of the day. So long as the bureaucracy was able to inspire the confidence of the political masters, the latter were prepared to grant greater discretion to allow the Public Service to pursue its reforms agenda. But as the bureaucracy showed a growing vision of what was expected or desired of a high-performing Public Service, it was left to drive the ‘reforms-through-training’ agenda.

The Singapore model that emerged is one that eschewed ideological or theoretical dogma but pragmatically adapts ideas selected for their relevance and adaptability to the operating context. On one level, the suddenly rapid and intense adjustments to remain relevant, and then following a period of stability a repeat of such frenetic pace of re-adjustment, make the Singapore model very much one of ‘punctuated equilibrium.’ At the same time, the systematic progression from political socialisation to create a loyal and dependable bureaucracy, and then equipping it with the requisite technical competencies, before shifting focus on building up long-term future-oriented strategic capacity, pointed to a sequential needs model.

The Singapore experience certainly points to the role of executive development and training contributing significantly to the reforms of the bureaucracy, and in turn the country’s modernisation. Yet, this chapter has cautioned against such a simplistic
equation. While executive development and training did improve the Public Service’s performance and facilitated Singapore’s success, other factors also contributed towards reforms and modernisation.

This chapter ends by identifying, through the conceptual framework, factors facilitating the use of executive development and training in reforming the bureaucracy. Consistently strong political support is paramount, and an economy-first imperative can provide the resources to finance training and reforms. Social development, by providing higher capacity human capital, also helped the reforms-through-training cause. Finally, the ability of the bureaucracy to pursue training and reforms rests on its ability to inspire confidence in stakeholders, particularly political masters, as an institution of the state.
CHAPTER 11
Conclusion: Professionalisation as a Means to an End

“The public sector for the new Singapore must be a catalyst for change, a pace settler in change, and a standard bearer on change. … the pursuit of the best of standards … demands first class training, extensive sharing of experience and a whole work environment conducive to the generation and experimentation of ideas. The Civil Service College plays a critical role in this.”

- Lim Siong Guan, Head of the Civil Service, 2001 ¹

It is evident that in 1959 the Singapore Public Service was in no position to propel the former colonial outpost that Singapore was then, into the modern vibrant city-state of today. The bureaucracy, at the threshold of decolonisation, comprised local leaders who were disconnected with the population and lower-level bureaucrats more preoccupied with rent-seeking than serving the public. This was a stark contrast from the Singapore Public Service of today: efficient and effective, not debilitated by corruption and ready to face and adapt to future challenges.

The principal argument of this thesis is that the reforms of the Singapore Public Service, over the course of 40 years, were driven by training and development. This is the overall answer to the main research question in this study.

11.1 Summing Up: Training & Development as Point of Reforms in Singapore

The study began by posing the key research questions: why did the Singapore Public Service invest so heavily and consistently in executive development and training? How did the Singapore bureaucracy undertake training and development over the years? What were the defining features and characteristics of Singapore’s approach in institutionalizing training and development in its Public Service?

From the outset of decolonisation, Singapore’s political leadership recognised the political value of the Public Service and the need to significantly train and retrain the bureaucracy to serve national goals and those of the political élite. From the beginning, formal and informal training was used to re-orient civil servants from a colonial-era organizational culture to an appreciation of the new operating milieu for state-formation and nation-building. When Singapore geared itself towards state-led development, training ramped up the management skills of senior officers to qualify them as the ‘economic general staff’ managing the developmental state. Similarly, the introduction of productivity and computerization reforms across the Public Service was

¹ Lim Siong Guan, Head of the Civil Service, Speech at the launch of the Civil Service College Statutory Board, 8 Oct 2001.
pursued through the skilling-up of the leadership corps, before they then disseminated these reforms across the bureaucracy. Finally, the Public Service for the 21st Century initiative harnessed executive development and training as a catalyst to introduce and disseminate reforms more widely across the Singapore bureaucracy.

The defining features of the Singapore development model underscore the positive effects of executive development and training upon the bureaucracy and Singapore’s modernisation. Key among these was the importance of strong political initiation and support for the bureaucracy and its reform agenda. Consistently strong support from the political leadership throughout the 40-year period provided the political authorisation necessary to engage in ambitious training exercises as well as the resource commitments and budgetary allocations to finance the Public Service’s training and reforms initiatives. Secondly, an economy-first imperative generated the resources to fund the bureaucracy’s programmes. The high-performing Singapore Public Service today had very modest origins and budgetary allocations at the time of self-government. The fruits of prioritising economic development, while taking some time to materialise, provided the wherewithal for the bureaucracy to develop, including growing its training initiatives, and to pursue reforms. At the same time, growth from an economy-first imperative also financed comprehensive social development, which in turn availed higher capacity human capital to staff the Public Service.

The evolution of the Singapore Public Service charts out a trajectory of development for bureaucracies in nascent states. As an almost amateurish bureaucracy in the beginning, alienated from the public it was meant to serve, the Singapore Public Service attracted the intervention and guidance of the political masters to gain a new appreciation of the electoral constituency that was its clientele. By the time it was technically proficient in its primary role of delivering public policies and services in the 1980s, the direct hands of the political masters were no longer as conspicuous and the Public Service was allowed to grow and developed according to the courses senior civil servants charted for the bureaucracy. When the Public Service embarked upon reforms to prepare itself for the future, the PS21 movement anticipating change and preparing for change, the bureaucracy had clearly come into its own, confidently charting its own course without need of political intervention, and many would argue without fear of upsetting the political leadership.

Distilling these defining features and identifying the Singapore model, amidst the background of Singapore’s successful modernisation and high performance reputation of its bureaucracy, leads to the inevitable question: can the Singapore model of executive development and training offer a template for countries aspiring reforms?
11.2 A Template for Cross-Jurisdictional Replication?

This dissertation does not seek to prescribe a template for replication in other jurisdictions, but offers some features for consideration. Singapore’s use of training to reform its Public Service and in turn to modernise the country hinged upon its particular island-wide context. Indeed, the background of the unfolding of this account highlights the exceptional context of Singapore – small physical size aiding governance, extended one-party rule providing political continuity, steady economic growth financing wide-ranging development, and a highly-educated workforce facilitating learning and development. It bears highlighting that these circumstances did not remain static but evolved and changed rapidly in the course of time. Accordingly, the strategy of using training and development to reform the bureaucracy also had to adjust and be adapted to the changing circumstances and context to remain relevant.

The harnessing of executive development and training as a catalyst to reform the bureaucracy offers, at one level, an example that has helped modernise a colonial outpost into a developed state and high-performing economy. This, hopefully, can inspire other jurisdictions – particularly developing countries seeking to reform – an exemplar of the possible despite seemingly implausible odds.

On a deeper level, specific aspects in Singapore’s approach towards ‘reforms-through-training’ in this study can be decontextualized. In other words, these features are not specific to the Singapore jurisdiction alone, and can be explored across other jurisdictional-contexts. For any reform-aspirant, hence, these jurisdictional-neutral features offer some themes for consideration; at the very least, some food for reflection.

Consistently strong political support features prominently in Singapore’s case. For any initiative to take off within the bureaucracy, the task of securing the necessary political authorisation and approval for funding from the limited budget will be challenging. Yet, as pointed out by Lim Siong Guan, who headed the PS21 reforms in Singapore, training and reforms improve the bureaucracy’s capacity to deliver public services: “you are doing something intended to raise the capabilities of the Public Service and raise the standard as well as the achievements and capabilities of Singapore.”

Politicians whose careers depend on electoral votes can be persuaded that any improvement in public services ultimately ingratiates them, as the government of the day, with the electorate. Even in countries where different political parties are elected to power at each election, it can be argued that enhanced public services from improved training and reforms will strengthen the electoral position of the political leadership in government. Consistent support from the political masters, hence, will

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2 Lim Siong Guan, Interview with Author, 20 Nov 2013.
provide the authorisation that will kick-start and sustain the drive to reform the bureaucracy through training and development.

A strong fiscal position, arising from steady economic growth over the years, certainly provided the fiscal wherewithal to drive and sustain the training-for-reforms initiative in the Singapore Public Service. Economic growth and fiscal largess may not be readily available to most countries, especially developing economies most in need of reforming their bureaucracies, as well as financing other developmental programmes. The reality, hence, is an economy-first imperative, for the foundational years, in order to accrue sufficient resources to finance developmental projects.

Improving the population’s standards of living often stands out as obvious and urgent developmental priorities, but setting aside budgetary appropriations to improve the bureaucracy has the consequential advantage of injecting efficiency in social reforms. Social development, indeed, contributes to the reform of the civil service since its personnel are drawn from the population. The knowledge and skills that are the foundational basis for post-recruitment training and development have their genesis in the educational system. The well-being of civil servants that constitute the bureaucracy’s human capital is a function of the population’s healthcare and standards of living. The values of civil servants – whether professing high levels of integrity or rent-seeking, service excellence or self-serving behaviour – are pre-shaped by the years of social norming as well as their induction into the bureaucracy. With citizens constituting the vote-banks of the politicians, allocating the yields of an economy-first imperative on social development needs no belabouring. But, focusing solely on social development and neglecting the bureaucracy risks undoing any progress in development. The key is drawing up a fine balance between investing in social development, wide-ranging as it may be, and executive development and training to reform the bureaucracy.

These features stand out as factors that facilitated Singapore’s ‘reforms-through-training’ experience. They are, as mentioned, by no means a definitive solution towards bringing efficiency and effectiveness to all bureaucracies. These are mere factors for consideration, in any reform-venture and – it bears reiteration – their relevance hinges upon the context for their application.

11.3 Starting a Conversation: Areas for Further Study

This dissertation does not aim to provide a prescriptive template for other developing nations as research outcome; rather, it seeks to start a conversation, particularly on current scholarship in the fields of the history and political science
applied to developing nations, the role of training and executive development in public administration, and the importance of reforms in the bureaucracy in development studies. This study, by drawing up an administrative history of training and executive development in the Singapore Public Service between 1959 and 2001, has plugged a gap in current literature on the Singapore bureaucracy, training and executive development vis-à-vis reforms in public administration, and the role played by the Public Service in the historical narratives of Singapore’s modernisation.

More significantly, this study wants to raise for discussion, by contextualising the evolution of the Singapore Public Service against the country’s economic and social development, whether Singapore’s transformation from colonial outpost to modern city-state can completely depend upon the political leadership or, indeed, just one man? By tracing the impact of training institutions upon the Singapore bureaucracy, it surfaces for discussion whether training, learning and executive development have a broader scope in public administration beyond the current bounds of personnel management? Can the bureaucracy and training, learning and executive development be designed with a more significant and precise role in drawing up state-formation and nation-building strategies for developing countries?

This dissertation is designed with a 10-year distance from the scope in order to desensitise the sources and ease access to information. This approach has worked well indeed, as demonstrated by the ready availability of crucial information, and can well be the basis for approaching future similar studies. When I began the thesis, I feared that I would be denied the cooperation of the key actors over the decades and not benefit from their observations and explanations, but this was not the case. A historical orientation (and distance from current politics) proved to be a successful strategy to get key officials to talk of their experiences and observations.

Be that as it may, events in Singapore affecting the Public Service and the Civil Service College since the period scoped for this study have evolved rapidly that an update will soon be timely. The Civil Service College underwent numerous changes since 2001. CSC underwent three leadership successions of Deans. A visioning exercise around 2006 tempered the performance-driven orientation with a greater emphasis on staff well-being. A broadening in the definition of talents by the Public Service Division, beyond the traditional bounds of the Administrative Service, led CSC to expand its stable of executive development programmes. This is a significant development given the longstanding emphasis on grooming only the Administrative

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3 All the officials approached for this study agreed to be interviewed or answered my questions through email correspondences.
Service élite, and the constant dilemma between leadership development and broad-based training.

Structurally, CSC underwent several organizational changes since 2001, as its programmes and personnel strength grew to meet the new environment. Its main internal departments at the time when CSC became a statutory board have been renamed a decade later: the Institute of Policy Development has since become the Institute of Public Sector Leadership, and CSC Consultants evolved into the Institute of Leadership and Organisational Development, although IPAM has retained its original nomenclature. A new research centre had also been set up as the Institute of Governance and Policy. These are not mere changes in nomenclature but signal significant re-positioning in the role and importance of executive training in Singapore.

Changes in the operating milieu of the Public Service, particularly after the 2011 general election, are also requiring CSC to adjust itself in relation to the bureaucracy. The 2011 election has sharpened the impact of citizens upon politics, especially with access to internet technology and new media; the proliferation of views and the rapid snowballing of opinions on social media compress the time and space for policy responses. As the government continues to grapple with the complexity of emerging issues, such as an ageing population, healthcare financing, remaining economically competitive, trans-national terrorism and non-traditional security threats, just to name a few, it has to set aside additional attention to engage with the citizenry.

How the Civil Service College will respond to the inevitable changes that will be expected from the present Public Service in this newly emerging operating milieu should be the focus of a serious update to this administrative history or even a further dedicated study. Indeed, with tetra-speed of internet media compressing policy-making and response timeline, the ‘new normal’ will probably soon be succeeded, if not already, by a ‘newer normal’. The time-lapse needed to facilitate access to data can well be shortened in order for a more timely review. There is much scope for future research to follow-on from this study.
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