

Project Management and the Political Process

The purpose of the public service is to implement the agenda of the politicians who are given the mandate to lead the country under most political systems including democracy.

The politicians have a mandate from the people to implement programmes and projects to meet the hopes and aspirations of the persons they represent with or without consultation.

The measures that Ministers want to implement usually are intended to reach the goals incorporated in their overall development strategy. We as public servants must remember that the politician got to this position based on the vision that he presented to the electorate.

The proposed programmes and projects under your particular ministry are but a part of a set intended to meet some over-arching goal such as to improve the quality of life and standards of living for BVIans.

The collection of projects proposed by all of government is normally referred to as the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). Part of our mission as the public service is to ensure the implementation of the PSIP in accordance with the agenda of the government overall. The PSIP is nothing more than the investment side of government. In most instances it represents investment in infrastructure in order to deliver programme services in a more efficient way.

We all know from the history of our country that the Government of the British Virgin Islands is the largest operation here in terms of spending and employment. GBVI actively promotes, regulates and manages the tourism and financial services sectors among its many responsibilities. In fact we can say without fear of contradiction that GBVI is the most critical development institution in the BVI as it provides financial support, technical assistance, supportive infrastructure and management for economic, social environmental and spatial activities. Government delivers these services through programmes and projects.

Given the importance of government to development in this country, it is of utmost importance that its programmes and projects be implemented efficiently and timely so as not to restrict growth and to compromise the Ministers agenda. Remember Ministers projects are to meet the hopes and aspirations of the people.

A programme or project really is a political decision and it cannot exist without such. This is a fundamental point that must not be lost on us as civil servants. In fact we can really say that a project is a political activity and as such there is a great public interest because of the many stakeholders.

So when the public or the press takes a keen interest in the status of projects such as the hospital, the clinics or the incinerator it is because these are critical to development, important to their interest or they are using their political rights to insist on good government and good governance. As civil servants we must respect these rights and interest as legitimate and necessary.

Because the role and function of the public service is to support Ministers in the implementation of the decisions, we must be keenly aware of our role, the political environment and the agenda of Ministers. In project management our role is to operationalize the policies of Ministers by supporting the implementation of their vision.

In project management our role is to development, implement, advise, and inform. We must understand the technical and political aspects of project cycle management, the public service delivery mechanisms and systems.

Designing, developing and implementing a project is really managing the application of a set of integrated skills in finance, engineering, administration, economics, sociology, physical planning, environmental sciences and many other fields. Generally there is a great level of co-ordination necessary as these skills are usually spread out over various agencies, departments and ministries.

Although the technical aspects of project management are important, in fact they are less critical to the political process. There are others more competent speakers in this area later in your programme.

Implementation and monitoring are two very critical activities, which attracts a lot of attention in the political process. Politicians/Ministers have milestones and achievements, which they must realize as success criteria. Managing a project is managing the roles of the developers, the agenda of the Minister and the various interests of non-governmental organizations

As a project manager you must control the flow of information about your project or Fletcher, Cromwell, Edmund or someone else from the media will do it for you. You must provide Ministers with policy statements for parliament, progress reports for Executive Council, Legislative Council, the press and the general public. Remember the public has a right to know and that there is a great public interest.

The idea here is that stakeholders, critics and other parties pursuing their various interests will be monitoring, measuring and misrepresenting the situation if you do not challenge them with the facts.

Remember you are implementing the Minister's programme and many people have a legitimate interest in the outcome, good or bad.

To sum up what I have said to you. Project management is the mission of the public service and activities here are seeking to put a political vision in place. Projects are legitimate political decisions aimed at meeting the hopes and aspirations of the people. The main role of the Ministry is to ensure the technical and bureaucratic processes are executed according to policy and strategy. Projects are political decisions and are therefore firm instructions to civil servants.