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CASE STUDY 3

TANZANIA

**David Sawe
Dickson Maimu**

BACKGROUND

The Government of Tanzania's concern about the size of its public service can be traced back to 1985 and the launch of an initiative to establish appropriate Manning levels and reduce the size of the civil service. This resulted in a largely unsatisfactory retrenchment exercise that, more than anything else, highlighted an urgent need to institute more effective personnel administration and establishment controls. At this time, the Government payroll was being processed by the Ministry of Finance, using software that had been installed in the 1960's, while all personnel and establishment matters were being managed independently by the Civil Service Department (CSD) entirely on the basis of paper-based files. No links existed between the two systems.

Against this background, the Civil Service Department developed a census exercise for the entire public service, which was held on 30th March 1988.

Public Service Census 1988

The main objectives of this exercise were to:

- identify "ghost workers" in the government payroll
- determine the exact size and composition of the civil service
- provide a complete data base on the profiles of every government employee.

This was a major undertaking, and its objectives were only partially achieved. While, some 16,000 ghost workers were identified out of a total of around 350,000 employees, follow-up attempts to reconcile the census data with the payroll were unsuccessful. It was not therefore possible to demonstrate that the identified ghost workers were effectively removed from the payroll. Although the census provided what were regarded as fairly reliable statistics on the overall size and composition of the public service, its database was, inevitably, a snapshot that remained frozen in time, because no process had been developed for regular updates beyond that initial census exercise. Worse, the data on individual employees was of very limited value due to technical constraints in the way the database had been designed.

What went wrong? At the outset, a very extensive list of desirable data items was drawn up as a "wish-list" of information to be collected. A broad-based consultation was then held, including census experts, computer database experts and international questionnaire-design consultants. The team strongly recommended that a much smaller single-page questionnaire should be used, designed specifically to facilitate quick understanding by both the respondents and the computer data-entry operators. The design would need to be constrained by the efficient record-length of the target computer's hardware and software to be used (ie 128 characters). The questionnaire should have tick-boxes for yes/no or multiple-choice answers and its design should aim

to minimise the risk of possible misinterpretation of questions as well as the need for manual encoding of answers. An initial series of output reports was designed, with payroll links. It was agreed that the colossal logistics of doing this exercise for the first time meant that the efficiency of data collection/entry needed to be optimised if the likelihood of success were to be maximised.

Although a complete questionnaire and accompanying database structure was developed by the team to meet the objectives outlined above, it was subsequently over-ruled. A new extended design was developed, without preliminary consultations, and many of the data items of the earlier wish-list were reinstated. Low-level computer programmers were then instructed to develop database structures for this design as a matter of urgency and to advise on the design of the questionnaire. As these programmers were not briefed on the earlier team work, this resulted in major design weaknesses in terms of both the questionnaire's usability and the efficiency of the database structures. This had a significant and inevitable impact on the logistics of running the exercise, and the subsequent usability of the data – including, critically, the capability of linking it to the payroll. An explanation of how, or why, the initial design came to be over-ruled are unavailable but this experience revealed clearly to those involved the value of placing great effort on design work.

Subsequent efforts to limit the size of the payroll have focussed on procedural measures which addressed mainly the recruitment processes. Several policy instruments were promulgated to better focus the lines of responsibility. But, in the meantime, the ability to monitor trends in the wage bill, numbers of employees and the presence of ghost-workers, on a continuous basis, remained a desired, but elusive objective.

National Pay Day Exercise

On 28th February 1994, the government conducted the “National Pay Day exercise”. Led by the Ministry of Finance, its primary objective was to confirm valid employees and detect any ghost workers in the payroll. The results of the exercise revealed some 13,360 cases of ghost workers, whereby this exercise's key objective was largely achieved. However, a secondary objective of the exercise was to build a personnel database by capturing key data on employees for entry into the payroll database. This did not happen, and doubts were subsequently expressed as to whether the Government Computer Department (GCD) could actually have undertaken the work given their known capacity problems in terms of both the computer platform and the additional skill requirements. Furthermore, though this was never proven, suspicions were voiced that both the 1988 and the 1994 data collections were being deliberately frustrated by influential computer staff who had a stake in the continued existence of ghost workers.

Permanent Control and Information Systems Project

With the start of the Civil Service Reform Programme in 1995, there was a recognition

that significant information gaps needed to be addressed, including:

- personnel data for informing management decision making
- current establishment structures and occupancy status of posts
- distribution of institutional authority and responsibilities
- performance and discipline in the public service
- current policies and controls on the recruitment process
- national deployment of public service employees
- planning and budgetary control to personnel expenditure
- analysis of the impact of retrenchment on the wage bill
- qualification and skills of personnel in the service
- attrition rates and succession planning in the service.

It was widely accepted that the most pervasive problem in personnel control and management in the Tanzania Civil Service was the lack of systematic data collection and dissemination on government employees. This led directly to a crisis in personnel information management and an inability to target the wage bill and plan human resource deployment. Other problems that resulted included the inability to pay retiring employees their pensions punctually and to even monitor and evaluate any policy measures or regulations on employment issues. The whole system lacked checks and balances, to the detriment of its accountability and transparency.

Therefore, a special initiative, called the Personnel Control and Information Systems Project, was included in the Civil Service Reform Programme to look into ways of alleviating these problems. Donor funding was made available by DFID, UK. The project's initial focus was to improve systems for personnel control and data management at a selected number of pilot ministries. However, after a consultative process the project team sought and received management agreement that it would be more effective to focus on improving the central systems in order to derive the greatest potential benefits as rapidly and comprehensively as possible.

Payroll Verification Exercise

Hence, in 1996, the project ran a payroll verification exercise, where employers were requested to sign off against payroll-sourced lists for each employee whose presence they could personally attest. In addition, an explanation was requested for those names that

were not being recognised. Some 6,000 payroll deletions then ensued, out of which some 500 were subsequently reinstated after being able to prove the validity of their existence on the payroll. Next, in 1997, two audits were carried out separately, examining the financial issues and the computer system. Inherent weaknesses were noted and the operational requirements were documented in order to procure a new and considerably more functional system, integrating human resource management with payroll administration.

Integrated Human Resource and Payroll System

In the meantime, a fresh data-collection exercise was designed, taking into account the lessons of 1988 census and 1994 payday. Here a single-page (with single no-carbon copy) was selected. A very broad consultative and testing process was followed. The final questionnaire focused only on capturing the very limited data set that was needed to ensure that the employee could legitimately be paid a salary or, in due course, a timely pension. Each questionnaire would be signed by the employee, by his/her head of section and by the department head. The questionnaires were accompanied by special data-sheets for the management of paper-flow and by a special manual which also included data codes and process management guidelines. Following their own suggestion, employers were allowed a three-month timeframe to fill and return the questionnaires with their supporting data-sheets. A national tender was floated to find a locally-based partner to take responsibility for the data-entry process.

The first batch of 300,000 questionnaires were released in March 1998 (using the payroll process for handling the delivery of documents to all employers) and by December of that year, the data was received on a CD-ROM, ready to use. Along the way, some 4,000 ghost workers were officially deleted from the payroll. However, as had also been the case during the 1996 personnel verification exercise, the monthly volume of requests for deletion transactions rose dramatically once the exercise was launched. Therefore, the number of known ghost workers that were deleted is generally assumed to be considerably less than the reality.

As the data was in a PC database, numerous reports and statistical analyses could be made, and the information could be readily correlated to the payroll. It was eventually merged with the payroll when the newly installed Integrated Human Resource and Payroll system was first activated in October 1999 prior to beginning the process of shadow-runs. The new system had its first live-run at 70% capacity in April 2000, and took on 100% as of the following month. On 20th June 2000, His Excellency, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr Benjamin William Mkapa, officially inaugurated the new system.

At present, the data from the integrated system has been printed onto the data-entry form and sent into the field for validation. The Government is now in position to know the exact nature of its workforce and wage bill on a monthly basis (as well as to undertake initiatives that target specific sub-groups therein).

