



Career development in a Caribbean nation: “When hard work and dedication are not enough”

The Director of St Oradsab’s Office of Statistics and Records (SOOR), Mrs Waterford, battled to contain her feelings of exasperation as she listened to Ms Lola Kato, a long-serving and hard-working clerical officer. Lola was distressed because she had been asked to assist with the induction of a new Statistical Assistant. Lola revealed between sobs that she had hoped to be appointed to the position, despite a lack of quantitative skills. That morning, 5 September 2001, Mrs Waterford realised she had to confront the challenges of recruitment, selection and succession planning that had plagued her department for some time.

She did not want to lose Ms Kato, who was already at the top of the clerical officers’ scale, so could not be recommended for a salary increase or promotion. Despairingly, Mrs Waterford wondered how she could convince the Public Service Commission (PSC), which appointed clerical staff to all government departments, that, for her specialist technical department, she should select both clerical and professional staff. She had tried and failed to do this at the beginning of her tenure a year ago – should she try again?

The Office of Statistics and Records (SOOR)

Based on the 2002 census, St Oradsab had a population of 600,000. The work of SOOR involved taking a national census at five-yearly intervals. It was also required to collect, compile, analyse and publish statistical information relating to the social, agricultural, mining, commercial, industrial and general activities and conditions of the inhabitants of St Oradsab.

The SOOR supervised the statistical activities of other departments of government, and organised a coordinated scheme of social and economic statistics about St Oradsab.

This case was written by Ann Wallace with supervision from Dr Richard Norman from Victoria University of Wellington at the Caribbean Case Course in Barbados, July 2004. It has been prepared as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The names of the company and of the individuals concerned have been changed to protect the privacy of all.

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SOOR was a technical department and, as outlined (*Exhibit 1*), the primary skill required was technical. In addition to the management team, the staff included statisticians, field investigators, statistical assistants, clerical officers and typists, as well as cleaners and office orderlies. The professional staff had all met the qualification requirements according to the establishment. The clerical staff and typists were also qualified to the level required.

The Public Service Commission

The department was entitled to 14 clerical officers (*Exhibit 2*) and these, along with the ten typists, had been sent to the department by the St Oradsab's Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC was the arm of the government responsible for the management of human resources in St Oradsab, through the Ministry of the Civil Service. It administered all aspects of HR, including recruitment, selection and appointment. In this role, it promoted, transferred, disciplined and dismissed staff in the public service. The process of appointments was highly bureaucratic.

If there was a vacancy for professional staff, the PSC indicated to the Training Administration Division (TAD) that there was a post to be filled. The TAD obtained permission from the Ministry of the Civil Service to recruit. The senior management of the relevant department participated in the interviewing and selection process. Once selected, the candidate's appointment was administered by TAD and approved by the PSC. TAD also controlled the budget for training.

For lower level appointments, the PSC took full control. Heads of department and senior management were not consulted about, and had no say in, the deployment of clerical staff, for example. The PSC regarded clerical staff as government general workers, part of a pool available to all departments to ensure that vacancies were always filled. Staff at this level moved around the public service from department to department either in response to their requests to be moved to another department, or for some other administratively expedient reason such as a shortage of clerical staff in a department with more pressing needs.

The director and management team

The SOOR was managed by the Director, Mrs Waterford, the Deputy Director, Mr Dailey, and Chief Statistician, Mr Keithley. This team was installed in the year 2000, taking over from a management team that, apart from Keithley, had moved to other positions within the government service.

Mrs Waterford had worked in SOOR for twelve years, during which time she had achieved her master's degree in statistical studies. She had then accompanied her husband on a three-year work assignment to Cuba, where she trained statistics students in a local institute. She had returned to St Oradsab and rejoined the SOOR, working for five years as a Statistician Level I, and then taking leave again, this time to accompany her husband and family for two years in Boston, USA. When her family relocated to St Oradsab, she resumed duties at SOOR, and also enrolled at the University of the West Indies where she completed a Masters of Business Administration (MBA).

New to the management team, the Deputy Director, Mr Dailey, had been transferred from the Treasury Department where he had been the Assistant Director. He was the holder of an MBA from the University of the West Indies along with a master's degree in finance and a bachelor's degree in statistics.

Chief Statistician, Mr Keithley, had been with the department for over thirty years, having worked his way up through the ranks from Statistical Assistant. He had improved his educational qualifications at his own expense, and felt that anyone who was serious about his or her own development should do the same. Keithley considered himself to be a fair man, giving 100 percent to his job and expecting no less from his subordinates.

Deputy Director Dailey had incurred the wrath of the Chief Statistician whenever he attempted to introduce management principles. Keithley had been known to say that there was no place for management skills in the department. It was a technical department, he had said, and it needed only competent technical personnel.

Promotion and staff retention at SOOR

In most of St Oradsab's government departments, clerical staff could advance their career prospects through promotion, with appropriate training, to professional roles.

In the case of SOOR, this seldom happened, which the Director regarded as a problem. Clerical staff stayed with the department for an average of three years before they sought either to be transferred, or to leave the public service altogether.

It was known that a number had left because they saw no scope for upward mobility because of their lack of quantitative capability. They perceived the situation at SOOR as "study mathematics or leave the department".

This rate of turnover left the department in a slight state of upheaval as new staff needed to be inducted, and to bond with the existing staff. Invariably, the new staff were younger, so there were generation gap issues that needed time to smooth out. New staff tended to make errors as they went through the learning curve of the department's work.

Internal promotion and in-house training

At her appointment as Director, Mrs Waterford was aware of the challenges of turnover faced by the previous administration, and she had been determined to stem the tide of people passing through. She had questioned the practice of providing clerical staff from the general pool to a technical department.

In 2000, she had made a representation to the PSC to allow her to select the staff at clerical level, as well as professional level. She felt it was necessary for this level of staff to have an aptitude for quantitative work. She strongly believed there was more that clerical staff could have done to help the work of the department in the timely completion of its data management, and its move to become customer-friendly.

She also felt that promoting from within was the best way to ensure continuity within the department and to maintain organisational memory. She knew, from her past experience in the department, that there was always dissatisfaction from customers when they had to deal with new staff members who were unfamiliar with their cases.

Following the retirement of the Level I Statistician, the Director had been able to make promotions within the department. The ripple effect was that a Level II Statistician had become a Level I. The longest-serving Statistical Assistant, recently returned from the University of the West Indies with a bachelor's degree in social sciences with a major in applied statistics, had been promoted to Statistician Level II, leaving a vacancy for a Statistical Assistant.

Knowing that this opening was likely, and in an attempt to get non-technical staff more involved in the work of the department, the Director had organised in-house training on basic statistics. The statistical assistants had accepted the training as a refresher course, but the non-technical staff completely ignored it, despite efforts by Mrs Waterford and Mr Dailey to encourage them. Lola Kato was one who had turned down the training offer, saying she feared the quantitative content.

Lola Kato

Lola Kato had stayed with SOOR longer than usual for a clerical officer, and the Director had been pleased with her output, attitude and general approach to work. Mrs Waterford had received many compliments about Ms Kato's handling of customers and visitors to the department.

Lola had served to orientate all new clerical staff, including giving assistance in a general context with the orientation of some professional staff.

Lola Kato had been in the public service for two years before joining SOOR, working in the Office of Public Sector Reform. As the initial work of that office was completed and it was felt that the number of clerical staff needed to be reduced, an opening had arisen at SOOR and Lola had been sent there. She held five CXC¹ General Proficiency certificates (without mathematics), and a Diploma in Customer Service from the St Oradsab's Community College. Before joining the government service, she had worked in a hotel as a front desk clerk for six years, a job she had held since age 16.

Solving the problems of the department

Just a month previous to the September incident with Lola Kato, Mr Dailey had said to Mrs Waterford, "I know you do not want to tackle those fellows at PSC again, but the changes we are hoping to make in this department will not take place if they keep sending us clerical staff who will frustrate us and themselves in the process."

¹ Caribbean Council of Examinations Certificate. Equivalent of GCE 'O' Level.

“It is not just the fellows at PSC, Dailey,” she had said, “it is that lot at TAD and the *mighty* politicians at the Ministry of the Civil Service. You are right, I do not want to tackle them.”

The Director had discussed the episode with Lola Kato at a meeting with the Deputy Director and the Chief Statistician. Both had agreed that losing Lola would be a blow to the smooth running of the clerical activities of the department. They had deliberated whether, in Lola’s best interests, she should transfer to another department, where she could build on her present skills and capabilities to gain promotion in the public service.

A problem with training

Deputy Director Dailey had said he was pleased, although surprised, at Lola Kato’s interest in the statistical assistant’s position, as a person with her attitude would have been an asset. The problem, he had said, was that Ms. Kato had undertaken no quantitative studies in her life. The department was not equipped to provide basic quantitative training. Neither did it have a budget for external training other than at executive level. With the budget being set by Cabinet and administered by TAD through the Ministry of the Civil Service, SOOR had no way of redirecting budget funds to training other than prescribed by the legislature. Training was the purview of TAD. Given that there had been general apathy towards quantitative studies, TAD did not run courses on statistics regularly.

The Director had raised the point that, in the present work environment, it was rare to find the integrity, dedication and loyalty that Ms Kato demonstrated. It was her view that efforts should be made to keep her in the department. She lamented that trying to encourage the clerical staff to study always proved futile as they either claimed that they were too old to be bothered with studies, or that they had never studied quantitative courses and did not want to try and fail.

She knew that transferring Lola would not resolve the high turnover of clerical staff in the department. Only two months ago, John Salters had said at his exit interview that he was going to the Ministry of Health as there was no future for him as a clerical officer in the SOOR.

Chief Statistician Keithley had said there was no room in his section for “passengers” and if anyone wanted to be in that section, they had to be “camera-ready” and able to meet the tasks of the section with competence. He had added that theirs was an office and not a nursery. Therefore it was not management’s role to design tasks for people who did not have the requisite qualifications, reminding his colleagues that the department’s mandate was statistics handling, not training.

“Listen,” he had said through pursed lips, “how do you all think the rest of the staff would react if we were to put this young lady into a position for which she was not fully qualified, and claim that we are training her?” He had said many times too, that he could not understand how anyone could have studied five CXC certificates and not done mathematics. He had been liberal with his negative comments about other staff members and procedures in the department but, not wanting to ruffle feathers, Mrs Waterford had refrained from exerting her authority over him in that regard.

Deputy Director Dailey had closed his eyes in resignation. He did not want to engage the Chief Statistician further on this topic. On numerous occasions he had heard Keithley's somewhat draconian views on the staffing issue.

"We need to find a way to solve this," he had said, looking past Mr Keithley and directing his voice at Mrs Waterford.

"That is how I feel too," Mrs Waterford had said, "but unless we can provide her with a promotion that carries a higher status in the eyes of her peers, not to mention a higher salary, I do not see how we can motivate her."

"Fiddlesticks!" shouted Keithley "The girl does not fit in here, let her go."

Exhibit 1

**POSTS AND QUALIFICATIONS
AT
ST ORADSAB'S OFFICE OF STATISTICS AND RECORDS**

Post	Qualification	Establishment
Director	Degree in statistics Master's level qualification	1
Deputy Director	Degree in statistics Master's level qualification	1
Chief Statistician	Master's degree in statistics	1
Statistician I	Bachelor's degree in statistics and post-graduate qualification	5
Statistician II	Bachelor's degree in Statistics	5
Information Technology Officer	Bachelor's degree in computer science	1
Statistical Assistant	5 CXC General Proficiency including mathematics	5
Field Investigator	4 CXC General Proficiency including mathematics	12
Senior Field Investigator	4 CXC General Proficiency including mathematics	8
Clerical Officer	4 CXC General Proficiency	14
Typist	4 CXC General Proficiency	10
Office Assistant	School-leaver's certificate	2
Cleaner	School-leaver's certificate	2

Exhibit 2

**ST ORADSABS OFFICE OF STATISTICS AND RECORDS
ORGANISATIONAL CHART**

