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Leadership for quality in the Papua New Guinea public service reforms

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Abbreviations

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CACC	Central Agencies Coordinating Committee
NCD	National Capital District
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PNG	Papua New Guinea
QA	Questionnaire Attributes

Over the last 25 years, public sector reform has been on the political agenda in Papua New Guinea (Diro 1991; Connell 1997). A lack of a shared understanding of the role that the public sector ought to be playing, increasingly difficult socio-economic issues and a concern for public sector accountability have been significant challenges for Papua New Guinea as a nation (May and Regan 1997).

In 1999, a program of public sector structural reforms was launched by the PNG Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, based on five key national objectives for the development of Papua New Guinea which form the basis of the PNG Government's structural reform program for the years 2001–04 (Morauta 2000:3). Of these five objectives, the first is to restore integrity to key institutions and the way in which the government system operates. The broad reasons for the reforms to the PNG Public Sector are outlined in an action plan for 2000–03 developed by the Central Agencies Coordinating Committee (CACC) on behalf of the Prime Minister's Department and the National Executive Council (CACC 2000:3).

These reasons are as follows.

- 1 The public sector is not performing effectively and consumes much of the nation's resources, yet its delivery of services is not getting any better.
- 2 The public sector management regime is widely seen as being ineffective by political leadership, public servants, and the public and is increasingly under pressure to meet escalating demands (to do more with less).
- 3 The public service needs to be more efficient, cost effective and innovative.

It needs to focus on delivery of services and it must enhance accountability and transparency.

- 4 The public sector needs to be more proactive and keep abreast of global trends and technical advances without compromising its national aspirations and culture.

This public service reform agenda is composed of a medium-term plan of action which includes a task force to review work and experiences in both Papua New Guinea and overseas in the area of public sector reform. This action plan includes a statement of objectives, strategies and programs at the broader level, that outline an approach towards reforming the public sector. They are supported by programs and activities setting out the specific activities to be undertaken at whole-of-government or agency levels. This includes the strengthening of key statutory bodies such as the Ombudsman Commission, the Auditor General, the Fraud Squad and the Public Prosecutor's Office. The day-to-day responsibility for implementing the reforms will be undertaken by the Central Agencies Coordinating Committee, which will include the setting up of a Public Sector Reform Unit within the Prime Minister's Department and the National Executive Council (CACC 2000:19).

The reform agenda also includes the retrenchment, funded by the World Bank, of a significant number of public sector personnel, in order to reduce public sector administration costs and to streamline the public sector as a whole (Igara 2000). The justification for this is that at the time of the announcement of the reforms in 1998, there were some 61,000 public servants

consuming 60 per cent of the national budget. The retrenchment exercise commenced in January 1999 and is planned to continue over four years, affecting some 7,000 public servants. Retrenchment categories include voluntary retrenchment, those who have reached their retirement age, those who are incapacitated and are medically unfit to continue in the service and those who will become unattached through rationalisation and restructuring in different departments. By the end of December 2000, some 1400 were retrenched (Department of Personnel Management 2000) and a similar number will be retrenched in 2001 (Igara 2000:8). It is not clear, however, how those within this significant number of personnel who are seeking alternative employment can be absorbed into a community with already limited employment opportunities and a declining economy.

This 'whole of government' approach seems ambitious given the anticipated time frame for implementation and the difficulties faced in similar previous public sector reform attempts. Moreover, the reform agenda could be viewed as an over-reaction to the criticisms levelled at public sector performance, particularly by funding agencies, as much as a genuine attempt to enhance service quality within Papua New Guinea.

Given this context, there is a clear need to undertake research into this significant change initiative to understand better the issues of public sector reform in the Pacific region; to generate knowledge which may contribute to public sector improvement in Papua New Guinea; and to explore the

alignment of the reform initiative with the broader quality movement within the public sector globally. This study, supported by a seeding grant through the School for Social Ecology and Lifelong Learning at the University of Western Sydney, was undertaken with these factors in mind.

Quality in the public sector

At the broadest level, this research study was informed by the 'learning organisation' movement, as it applies to both the private and public sectors globally (Senge 1990a; Senge 1990b; Burgoyne 1992; Lipton and Greenblatt 1992; Wheatley 1993; Gardner 1995; Spender 1996). Such organisations are described by Senge (1990a:1) as 'organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together'.

Attributes of such organisations could include being adaptive to changes in the competitive environment; having leaner, flatter structures (those with fewer layers); the existence of transnational and non-traditional alliances; an understanding of global business practices, customers, and cultures; accessible information systems and knowledge sources; development of core business differentiation and niche markets; a responsive service orientation; enhanced organisational learning capacities to promote faster innovation; highly trained flexible people as the principle resource; as well as having a long-term, socially conscious world view.

From within this broad paradigm, the research was guided specifically by an analysis of literature relating to the developing quality movement as it relates to public sector organisations (Binshan and Ogunyemi 1996; Wilkinson 1997; Dorsch and Yasim 1998; Erridge et al. 1998; Boland and Fowler 2000; Lagrosen 2000). This movement has been emerging since the early 1990s (Pollitt 1990; Offner 1993) and has been manifested in a range of public sector quality initiatives throughout a number of countries. For example, this movement has been of particular significance in Australia through the work of public sector quality networks across all levels of government (TAFE Queensland 1994; NSW Premier's Department 1998; Australian Quality Council 2000). This global movement has been characterised by a shift in public sector organisational culture to reflect

- government as the catalyst for providing direction and policy options rather than being the sole provider of services
- community influence and ownership through empowerment rather than providing pre-determined solutions
- the injection of competition between both public and private providers into service delivery
- the transformation of rule-driven organisations towards mission-driven cultures
- a 'results' orientation through funding outcomes and achievements rather than inputs
- a focus on identifying and meeting customer and client needs
- an enterprising and entrepreneurial philosophy requiring earning as well as spending

- an anticipatory approach to service delivery requiring the development of long-term preventative strategies to community issues rather than short-term reactions
- decentralisation and a movement from hierarchy to teamwork/participation
- an increasingly market focused orientation
- and a philosophy of continual improvement of products, processes and services.

In particular, this movement represents belief in a customer focused philosophy of service provision, supported by a leadership commitment to continual improvement of organisational processes, knowledge-based decision making, ongoing training and development for all staff members, systems thinking, collaborative planning and the achievement of measurable business outcomes.

Research focus

It has been purported that the PNG Public Sector reforms are being implemented 'to achieve excellence in the performance and delivery of government services to the people of Papua New Guinea within the resources (human and financial) capacity of the nation' (CACC 2000:12) with the key objectives of the process being to

- 1 strengthen the policy planning and decisionmaking processes as well as the relationship between political institutions and the state services (public services, constitutional and statutory organisations)
- 2 streamline functions, organisational structures and resource management

- 3 establish and align the cost of government operations with available funding and development priorities
- 4 improve efficiency, performance and accountability
- 5 establish a stable, professional and performance-oriented public service
- 6 improve reporting systems and database linkages at both agency and government-wide levels
- 7 establish and rationalise office and accommodation infrastructure and facilities to better support public sector operations.
- 8 improve partnership and cooperation amongst public sector, churches, NGOs and the private sector.
- 9 to establish a public service that operates with probity, integrity and respect for the law.

These nine objectives for the PNG Public Sector seem to reflect some elements of the quality movement described above in that they advocate an orientation to improved service delivery, efficiency of resource utilisation and data-based decisionmaking. Furthermore, these PNG objectives reflect three broad strategies which can be described as follows.

- 1 Improving organisational management—the effective utilisation of resources to achieve desired goals and outcomes and the development of processes and infrastructure to maintain adequate service provision.
- 2 Enhancing personnel development—staff learning through planned professional development activities, opportunities created while undertaking roles, strategies for staff wellbeing as well as the promotion of positive work attitudes.

- 3 Promoting authentic leadership—leadership based on accepted ethical principles and behaviours reflecting the respect generated through the modelling of appropriate behaviour, attitudes and accountable actions by senior leaders.

The link between these three themes and the nine objectives is further outlined in Table 1.

With these nine objectives as the context, this research project sought to

- gauge the degree to which public sector departments were perceived to reflect attributes of organisational quality as defined within the public sector quality movement
- identify challenges facing public sector leaders during the public sector reform process
- consider issues of leadership development associated with these challenges.

The research process

The themes and objectives above, which have been utilised as categories for analysis within this study, have particular significance for those holding leadership positions at senior departmental level. Those approached to participate in this research study, therefore, were department leaders at the secretary, assistant secretary and middle management level. The research process was spread over approximately 12 months and had two elements, an initial questionnaire followed by site visits to a number of public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea. The initial questionnaire and interview questions were structured around these

three themes in order to derive information about the existence of the objectives, but also to include, within these three themes, attributes which are associated with the broader public sector quality movement outlined above.

Initial questionnaire

The first element of the research was in the form of a 36 item questionnaire which was forwarded to 37 public sector organisations identified by the researchers and was targeted at the senior leader, the secretary, within the organisation (see copy of the questionnaire at the conclusion of this paper).

The respondents were senior leaders or middle managers from sixteen departments across the public sector in Papua New Guinea. The range of positions held by respondents included Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Director-General, Manager and Senior Executive. Respondents' experience within the PNG Public Sector ranged from 6 to 27 years and the majority (13) were male. The questionnaire sought these leaders' views on the current status of public sector organisations generally within Papua New Guinea with respect to how these organisations functioned in relation to the questionnaire criteria.

Table 1 Themes emerging from the nine objectives of the PNG Public Sector reform agenda

Theme	Objective
Improved organisational management	Streamline functions, organisational structures and resource management
	Establish and align the cost of government operations with available funding and development priorities
	Improve efficiency, performance and accountability
	Improve reporting systems and database linkages at both agency and government-wide levels
Enhancing personnel development	Establish and rationalise office and accommodation infrastructure and facilities to support public sector operations
Promoting authentic leadership	Establish a stable, professional and performance-oriented public service
	Strengthen policy-planning and decisionmaking processes as well as the relationship between political institutions and the state services
	Improve partnerships and cooperation amongst public sector, churches, NGOs and private sector
	Establish a public service that operates with probity, integrity and respect for the law

Items 1–19 concentrated on the management of public sector organisations generally in Papua New Guinea and sought responses on the broad areas of organisational leadership (organisational values and innovation capacity), strategy and planning (system responsiveness, existence of organisational partnerships, change management and long-term planning), knowledge management (use of data), people development (existence of teamwork, employee responsibility and staff training), customer and client focus (the understanding of customer/client needs and the use of customer surveys), quality of services (continual process improvement, the use of national/international quality assurance standards and technology use) and processes for measuring organisational results (internal evaluation and the use of national/international benchmarks).

The questionnaire then focused on the two other key areas identified from the objectives for PNG Public Sector organisations discussed in the previous section, namely authentic leadership and staff development. Items 20–30 concentrated on the attributes of public sector leaders, including items relating to leaders' capacities to manage their organisations, cope with ambiguity, focus on organisational purpose, think systemically, hold a long-term organisational vision, care for staff, trust in staff competence, behave ethically, encourage collaboration and hold high expectations for the organisation. Items 31–36 concentrated on attributes of public sector employees including their capacity

to undertake a range of roles and responsibilities, cope with changing community needs, learn across a lifetime, perform their duties skillfully, understand the needs of their clients/customers and utilise technology.

For each item respondents were invited to rate, on a Likert scale of 1–5, the degree to which each item was important for the public sector within Papua New Guinea and the degree to which each item currently existed within public sector organisations within Papua New Guinea. The questionnaire also contained a number of open-ended questions relating to their particular organisation and the respondent's professional development in the areas of leadership and quality management.

The questionnaire structure and content was discussed with, and undertaken by, a group of eight middle managers (three female and five male) from a number of public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea in April 2000 to gain feedback as to the length, language, structure and content of the instrument. From the 37 questionnaires finally distributed, 16 questionnaires were returned, which represents a response rate of approximately 43 per cent.

Organisational visits

This element of the research, which followed the questionnaire, was undertaken in Papua New Guinea and took place within a number of public sector departments in Port Moresby. The visits had a number of purposes, which are listed below.

- To examine at first hand the issues relating to public sector organisations and to gain an understanding of the social and cultural context of these organisations.
- To gauge similarities and differences regarding beliefs about the value of the reform process across some departments within the PNG Public Sector.
- To investigate further some of the issues raised by questionnaire respondents.

During the period between 17–20 April, 2000 and again between 27–30 November, 2000, visits were made to a total of thirteen public sector organisations situated within Port Moresby in the National Capital District. These organisations or departments, and descriptive information about them, are presented in Table 2.

The researchers visited a cross-section of PNG Public Sector organisations—large and small, semi-autonomous and government regulated—in order to gain reliable evidence for the existence of the three themes in question and assess how widely these themes were in existence across departments. Consequently a broad-brush approach was taken rather than intensive work in a limited number of organisations. All organisations visited had a medium to long-term existence in Papua New Guinea with a range of between 10 and 54 years. The range of branches throughout Papua New Guinea varied between 1–26 with five departments having a nationwide operational scope. There was also diversity in organisational size with staff numbers ranging from 12—3200 people.

All site visits had been pre-arranged with a senior member of the organisation, usually the Secretary or the Secretary's delegate. Visits took place at the organisations themselves, of which six were at Waigani, three at Boroko, three at Gordons and one in Port Moresby. On most occasions two visits were scheduled for each day.

It was intended that approximately two hours would be spent at each organisation or department conducting semi-structured interviews with small groups of employees holding various positions within the departments. During the interviews it was intended that the key themes of organisational management, personnel development and authentic leadership would be explored through discussion of a number of questions surrounding each theme. In reality, however, this approach only took place at four of the visits, as indicated in Table 3. Participant numbers at interviews varied from one to 13 depending on the availability of staff at the particular interview times or the total number of staff within the organisation itself, and 78 per cent of all participants were male. In these situations the nature of the interview process was modified to be less formal, and the interview focused on questions drawn from specific areas of interest to both the researchers and the interviewee(s).

Kinds of interview participation

The kind of participation varied according to the size of the group and the expectations of the group being visited. This ranged from a climate of confidence and a desire to

Table 2 An overview of public sector organisations in which interviews were undertaken

Name of organisation	Organisation description	Organisational purpose	Services	Details
Department of Education	Government education and training provider	Promotion of integral human development, improving standards of education and ensuring access for all	Teacher training; inspectoral and guidance; national education system	Branches: 21 Staff: 3200 Years in PNG: 54
Department of Health	Government health services provider	Monitoring the physical, social and mental wellbeing of the people in their communities, and promoting health through preventative and curative medicine	Treatment and diagnosis; Immunisation; baby care; family planning; hospital management; health education	Branches: 21 Staff: 800 Years in PNG: 50
Department of Home Affairs	Government service provider	Promotion of integral human development within PNG society	Social & community development; promoting events/issues of national, provincial & local importance	Branches: 1 Staff: 70 Years in PNG: 25
Department of Personnel Management	Government service provider	Ensuring a small, cost-effective and efficient public service that is competent and responsive to the implementation of government policies and delivery of services to the people of PNG	All public service coordination; overall policymaking; industrial and employment conditions; training; organisational design; advisory services	Branches: 1 Staff: 88 Years in PNG: 25
Department of Works	Government infrastructure and services provider	Responsible for the maintenance of public buildings, roads and transport	Maintenance of public roads; inspection of public facilities; overseeing the development of public infrastructure	Branches: 24 Staff: 1966 Years in PNG: 30
National Apprenticeship and Trade Testing Board	Government sponsored secretariat overseeing vocational training	Responsible for the enforcement of government legislation in skills development and training throughout PNG	Inspection of facilities & personnel; formulation of skills standards; advice & counselling; planning & management of training programs	Branches: 1 Staff: 16 Years in PNG: 49
National Cultural Commission	Government sponsored community service provider	Responsible for maintaining both traditional and modern arts and culture of the people of PNG	Documentaries of various cultural forms; promotion of all forms of cultural activities; dissemination of information & skills	Branches: 3 Staff: 130 Years in PNG: 26

Name of organisation	Organisation description	Organisational purpose	Services	Details
National Education Institute	Government educational training and development organisation	Provision of training and development & curriculum support for staff of community schools and national high schools	Pre-service teacher training; inservice teacher training; curriculum development	Branches: 1 Staff: 46 Years in PNG: 26
National Institute of Standards and Industrial Technology	Government sponsored standards monitoring organisation	Provision of policy advice and support to the government and private organisations regarding appropriate industry standards	Policy advice on existing industry standards; standards development, monitoring and certification	Branches: 1 Staff: 12 Years in PNG: 10
Office of Environment and Conservation	National regulation agency for environmental protection and nature conservation	Ensuring natural and physical resources are managed to sustain environmental quality and human wellbeing	Enforce compliance with standards, policies, codes of practice and legislation governing protection and nature conservation in PNG; collect physical and biological data; provide advice on minimising environmental degradation, pollution controls and urban/rural settings	Branches: 6 Staff: 174 Years in PNG: 25
Office of Libraries and Archives	Government sponsored information management organisation	Management of a range of information services and the provision of access to library resources and service to the general public	Accessioning books and other information sources; promoting literacy; providing information for special projects; keeping records of government and other publications	Branches: 1 Staff: 20 Years in PNG: 25
Ombudsman Commission	Government sponsored constitutional body	Ensuring government responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the people; improving the quality of the work of government bodies; assisting in reducing defective legislation and practices; encouraging fair dealings, public accountability and leadership	Receiving and investigating complaints from members of the public regarding any government service, government or statutory body; investigating any general discriminatory practices	Branches: 4 Staff: 109 Years in PNG: 25
PNG Waterboard	Government sponsored company	Provision of water and sewage services in 11 urban centres in an environmentally friendly manner	Providing water to all domestic customers and business houses; providing sewage services to some urban customers	Branches: 26 Staff: 272 Years in PNG: 40

discuss public sector issues and the achievements of their organisations specifically, through to participants being somewhat reserved in relation to describing the cultural features of their departments. Some session participants appeared nervous or apprehensive about participating, perhaps because of a lack of understanding as to the purpose of the session or how the outcomes of the research might affect them. On all occasions any concerns held before the session seemed to have been alleviated by the end of the visit.

Participants were usually middle or senior managers from within the organisation, although on some occasions junior staff were in attendance. Six sessions involved large groups of participants which included all the departmental heads. The large majority of participants were male.

With the larger groups, the discussion tended to be dominated at first by a few participants. On these occasions one participant, or a small number of participants, tended to speak for the group, with others showing agreement by nodding or stating the affirmative. Sometimes participants would add further comments to those made by a respondent or reiterate what had been stated if it was thought the researchers had not fully understood what had been stated.

On two occasions management plans, organisational structures or corporate plans were provided to assist in understanding the background to the organisation. On all occasions most participants were willing to discuss issues openly, though there were varying degrees of interest in participating. Some participants appeared keen to

participate in the process, while others seemed unenthusiastic. Generally, a positive climate permeated all visits, with participants sharing, to varying degrees, their ideas about the public sector as a whole and their organisations in particular.

Site visit procedures

On the occasions when there was group participation, the researchers began the process by inviting general introductions and then briefly explaining the nature of the research and how it had come about. Each participant was provided with a copy of the questions and the nature of the questions was then discussed before any specific discussion began (see Appendix 2).

It was decided by the researchers to discuss each group of questions as a whole, and invite participants to address which ever questions they thought most appropriate. This seemed a more productive way to proceed with the discussion than working through individual questions systematically. On two occasions only one theme was discussed as this seemed most appropriate to the group in question. On three occasions, when there was only one interviewee, the set questions were not referred to at all, with the interview being more of an open discussion.

During the sessions the researchers occasional asked clarifying questions or rephrased questions to ensure that the meaning was clear to participants. On all occasions the participants seemed to understand the point of the questions and only occasionally requested that a question be explained in greater detail. On some

occasions participants brought writing materials and took occasional notes.

Generally the visits went for longer than had originally been agreed, even when the time had been re-negotiated at the beginning of the interview. On occasions, individuals or small groups of participants stayed a little longer after the interview to discuss an issue further. On some occasions it was difficult for the researchers to catch everything that was being said due to the fact that some participants spoke quickly or quietly, but generally the key point was understood. The researchers sought clarification in such situations by either paraphrasing the point being made or requesting that the point be repeated.

During the sessions the researchers recorded key points on prepared sheets or on butcher's paper. These were expanded by the researchers as soon as possible after each session in order to complete details and record other insights not recorded during the actual session.

The actual site visits varied in the value they had in providing insights into public sector departments, depending on the number of participants and their motivation to be part of the process. It was unfortunate that a team was not available at each visit to provide a broader perspective to the issues concerning each organisation. It would also have been valuable to institute other procedures—

- 1 a longer period of time in each organisation to prepare for the session and to meet individually with the secretary or delegate to provide an overview of the session and gain an insight into those participating.

- 2 obtaining documented materials relating to the organisation on all occasions before the visit, as this proved to be useful in clarifying some of the issues raised during the sessions.

The site visits, however, were a significant part of the research project and provided the researchers with a contextual insight that could not have been achieved as effectively in any other way. Information from the visits generally supported the findings from the initial questionnaire in relation to the existence of the theme, the impact of the public sector reforms and the challenge for organisational leadership.

Research findings

It would appear from the questionnaire responses and discussions during organisational visits that most participants believed in the need for public sector reform. It was pointed out that the PNG Public Service was undergoing major changes as part of the public service reforms in an attempt to be more service-oriented and deliver goods and services to the bulk of the population in the rural areas. The outcomes of the initial questionnaire and the onsite visits, discussed in detail below, have been broadly grouped under findings relating to organisational management, personnel development and authentic leadership.

Organisational management

It seemed clear that the degree to which departments were being affected by the significant reforms within the public sector varied from department to department. Those departments that had a greater degree of autonomy to initiate policy and institute change from within seemed more

confident about their future. Those operating directly under government mandate were finding the changes more difficult to manage, particularly because of leadership changes, policy changes, funding cuts and tighter legislative controls.

The need for the development of positive relations with other sectors and the public, to enhance the media image of the public sector generally and to enhance partnerships locally, nationally and internationally were also noted. Moreover, respondents stated the need to increase each organisation's capacity to manage change, provide services, sustain the momentum of innovations and avoid complacency given that morale was low as a result of the continuing reduction in public sector staff numbers.

Moreover, there was a perceived need to create an institutional capacity to manage new policy requirements, improve planning, refine reporting, strengthen policy development, enhance decisionmaking processes, further utilise technology and to clarify each department's functions within the revised public sector.

The 19 attributes in this section of the questionnaire represent what could be constituted as an organisation's quality system—those key elements which would need to be in place in order to sustain a high standard of service delivery while continually seeking to improve service delivery processes and outcomes.

These 19 attributes were supported overwhelmingly by respondents. The average score for the importance of

attributes to public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea was very high at 4.4 with a range of between 4.1 and 4.9 across all items. However, only on the use of technology did the average score for existence exceed a rating of three. Questionnaire results indicated a lack of understanding, or utilisation of, national or international quality standards to provide benchmarks for comparison and improvement. Similarly, there was no evidence that internal self-assessment or evaluation of customer satisfaction data was being utilised to drive organisational improvement.

Responses from this part of the questionnaire are outlined in Figure 1.

Despite the significant changes taking place, and the accompanying uncertainty, many participants were confident in the capacity of their department to manage the challenges being faced. They believed that existing management, communication, staffing and organisational problems were fundamentally outside their sphere of influence—that is, that solutions to these issues lay predominantly at the political level.

Personnel development

There was a need, expressed by the majority of participants, for greater efficiency across the public sector as a whole, suggesting the success of the reform process depended ultimately on human resource issues. This argument supported the public sector downsizing exercise started in 1999 but noted that the current government had been unable to fund the retrenchment of redundant employees so some thousands of officers were still on the

government payroll although not undertaking their duties. Some participants were critical of the work ethic of many public sector employees which was echoed in the following statement from one senior leader:

The work attitude of most public servants in Papua New Guinea is a national disgrace. As a result productivity is probably well below what can be achieved given the resource restraints in Papua New Guinea. There must be a complete turn around in work attitude and those who cannot fit in should be disciplined and even [have their employment] terminated. Interagency communication and cooperation must be improved. All agencies are supposed to work together to provide services to the government, the public and private sector.

Also in a similar vein:

The problem with public sector organisations is quite rooted within the whole system, from political level, management level and ordinary public servants. So maybe we can talk about it as 'the public sector attitude!' I think to correct the problem is to change attitudes on such work issues such as work ethics, professionalism, career development, productivity, responsibility, accountability and so on

Research findings indicated that the needs of both customers and staff could be better met within public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea, than they are at present. Participants also articulated a strong belief in the need for planned, ongoing staff development to improve the productivity of staff, to

enhance professionalism and to address issues of staff welfare. Furthermore, a need was expressed to develop systems of internal monitoring and evaluation, and to critically address current departmental and cross department procedures.

Questionnaire respondents were invited to rate the importance and existence of factors relating to following areas: employee skill level, understanding of customer and community needs, attitudes towards self-development, skill level and the utilisation of technology. Generally respondents believed that performance in these areas could improve substantially.

As indicated in Figure 2 below, questionnaire respondents perceived the attributes for public sector employees as highly important and relevant to the PNG Public Sector, with an average importance rating of 4.4 across all areas, with a range of between 4.1 and 4.6. Belief in the existence of these attributes was, however, much lower, with an average existence rating of 2.7 and a range of 2.6 to 2.9. This seemed to indicate a generally low priority for ongoing staff training and development and a belief that staff learning was undervalued as a strategy for public sector quality, innovation and improvement.

Authentic leadership

Respondents noted that over the 25 years since independence a public sector culture had developed that was not conducive to change and was not benefiting enough from developments in the private sector or other public sector organisations internationally. While it was suggested that the public sector in Papua New Guinea as a whole was aware of the global changes

Table 3 The nature of visits undertaken during the organisational visits as part of the research project

Organisation	Participant numbers		Nature of interview
	Male	Female	
Department of Works	13	0	Discussion of key seminar concepts with the extended management team and discussion of implications of quality in the public sector
Office of Libraries and Archives	4	9	Discussion of key seminar concepts with an extended team and discussion of the impact of change within their organisation
Department of Personnel Management	9	3	Structured interview with the entire senior management team covering all key discussion themes
Department of Environment and Conservation	8	2	Structured interview with the entire senior management team from the conservation section and the environment section covering all key discussion themes
National Apprenticeship and Trade Testing Board	8	2	Discussion of key seminar concepts with the extended management and administration team and discussion of leadership issues within their organisation
PNG Waterboard	5	0	Structured interview with the five department heads covering all key discussion themes
Ombudsman Commission	3	0	Structured interview with the Assistant Commissioner, Human Resources Manager and Media/Public Relations officer covering the key themes
National Education Institute	2	1	Discussion of the changing status of the institute and the academic need of staff as a result of amalgamation with the university
Department of Home Affairs	2	0	Informal discussion with the Sectional Manager and a second informal discussion with the Assistant Secretary. Questionnaire themes discussed only in a general manner
National Institute of Standards and Industrial Technology	2	0	Discussion, with Director-General and senior manager, of the emerging quality needs of the PNG Public Sector and the potential of international standards as a quality approach
Department of Education	1	0	Informal discussion with the Assistant Secretary
National Cultural Commission	1	0	Informal discussion with the Manager of Management Services
Department of Health	1	0	Informal discussion with the Assistant Secretary
Total interviewees	59	17	

taking place in relation to organisational change, it lacked the knowledge and expertise to enhance its competitiveness, efficiency and effectiveness. One respondent described the culture of the public sector as 'hierarchical and rigid...inflexible to adapt to change, and control oriented'.

In the category of leadership, questionnaire respondents were invited to rate the importance and existence of factors relating to leaders' expertise, ability to cope with change, understanding of their organisations, capacities to behave ethically, capacity to care for, support and encourage staff as well as the possession of a long-term vision for the future.

It was clear from the responses to the questionnaire that all leadership attributes were perceived as highly important and relevant to public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea, as the respondents overwhelmingly supported these attributes. The average importance rating was 4.5 with a range of between 4.3 and 4.8. However, it was also clear that the respondents did not believe that these leadership attributes existed to a high degree in PNG Public Sector organisations. The average existence score was 2.9 with a range of between 2.6 and 3.2. Questionnaire responses seemed to indicate that effective leadership was lacking in the interpersonal area including the capacity to behave ethically, to care for employees and to recognise their achievements. Responses for this part of the questionnaire are outlined in Figure 3.

Even though there were only 16 respondents to the questionnaire, and a limited time for onsite interviews, it was clear from the data gathered that there are significant challenges facing public sector leaders in Papua New Guinea. The uncertainty of the likely outcomes of the significant public sector changes, and the political nature of these changes, were identified as being of great concern to respondents. It was clear that organisational leaders have a pivotal role in the reform process, especially with regard to setting an authentic and credible example to employees and ensuring that they are sufficiently trained and supported in undertaking their responsibilities.

In their questionnaire comments, a number of respondents expressed concern with the instability caused by the number of changes to departmental leadership, the process of making senior appointments, the inappropriate placement of some leaders, the lack of academic qualifications and the need for greater leadership qualities of some of those appointed to these positions. The following comments reflect these concerns.

Every leader must get to know his employees so that he can be able to help in their strengths and weaknesses. They must be able to understand the social environment of employees so they can be fair in their expectations of staff performance.

I expect to see that leaders take the opportunity to assess their leadership qualities through questionnaires like this. This is because I believe that other people

have views that the leader may have overlooked in his day-to-day performance. Quality management does not come cheap, it requires a collective effort to groom every one of us to produce quality leaders.

There was a perceived need for a broad cultural change across departments to facilitate system improvement in response to changing needs, and for leaders to 'care for people, right down to the tea boy, who work in the organisation and ensure they are happy...to work collaboratively with team members in organisational decisionmaking processes and to recognise and celebrate the achievements of employees within the organisation'. Another view focused on the lack of consistency at the political level in relation to providing direction, stability and support during the change process. This view was expressed by some participants in the following way:

Political instability through incompetent and weak leadership at the electoral and parliamentary system level; constant changes in leaders of public sector organisations; selections and appointments by affiliation rather than on professional merit; corruption; lack of transparency and accountability on public governance; lack of national consciousness; lack of respect for, and the heart to do, public good are some areas which may resemble my beliefs

Appointments of departmental heads too regular and politicised, and appointments are no longer based on individual merits. This does affect the operation of the department concerned. Appointment of

staff into the public service is also not on individual merits (nepotism).

Overall, those participating in the research indicated the immediate need for enhancement of the quality of leadership within the public sector, believing that nothing short of cultural change was needed in order to maintain the credibility and integrity of the public sector as a whole. There seemed to be willingness, expressed by those in middle management positions, to address issues of quality improvement if given the opportunity to do so.

Challenges for senior leadership

Within Papua New Guinea, at the most senior level, those defined as leaders would include all members of parliament, leadership of government departments, board members of statutory authorities, the police commissioner, the commander of the defence force, judges, ministerial staff and constitutional office holders (Dorney 2000:271; Ombudsman Commission of Papua New Guinea 2000). Most of the participants in this study, as senior departmental leaders, were part of this senior leadership group. Considering the research process as a whole, the major challenges that such leaders would need to address, as identified both through the questionnaire and site visits, can be summarised as follows:

- 1 to provide staff training and development to employees to facilitate the implementation of new public sector organisation and to provide career paths for employees (localised training programs; IT training; equal access to training and development)

- 2 to develop a positive attitude amongst public sector employees in order to enhance commitment and productivity (delegation of responsibility; leadership stability; changing traditional work habits and attitudes; time management; sense of belonging and purpose; enhanced discipline; improved commitment to work; greater customer focus; reduced nepotism)
- 3 to enhance internal staff communication to encourage collaborative action and teamwork
- 4 to improve policy coordination between central offices and provincial administrators to enhance the likelihood of policy implementation (transparency of policy decisions)
- 5 to develop clear directions, guidelines and procedures to improve internal efficiency within departments and across the public sector as a whole
- 6 to improve administrative/management processes such as financial management and time management
- 7 to improve staff welfare, morale and a sense of individual worth among employees (effective staff appraisal; staff incentives; gender equity)
- 8 to develop a positive leadership culture across the public sector in order to provide leadership opportunities for a wider section of employees.

These identified challenges seem to align with the nine objectives for the future of the PNG Public Service outlined at the beginning of this paper. Clearly, the Central Agencies Coordinating Committee, the National Executive Council and the Public Sector Reform Unit will need to consider the kinds of professional support required

for leaders at all levels if the lack of professional development noted by those involved in this research, as described below, is indicative of the public sector as a whole.

Both questionnaire findings and the site-based interviews indicated a lack of confidence in the whole area of organisational leadership. While this concern stemmed to a large degree from the politicisation of the appointment of leaders and the subsequent instability, it was clear that those leaders participating in the research had neither sufficient experience nor adequate preparation for their appointments.

Leadership development

As part of the questionnaire, and during the interviews, participants were asked about the preparation and professional development they had undertaken in relation to leadership and quality management.

The large majority of questionnaire respondents indicated that they had not undertaken any formal training in the areas of leadership or quality management within their current organisations, nor, in fact, at any stage during their careers. This was particularly true in the case of training in quality management.

The limited leadership training which had been undertaken by these respondents included seminars conducted by overseas agencies visiting Papua New Guinea (such as that conducted by the Australian Expert Services Overseas Program), a six week course offered by the Papua New Guinea Institute of Public Administration and

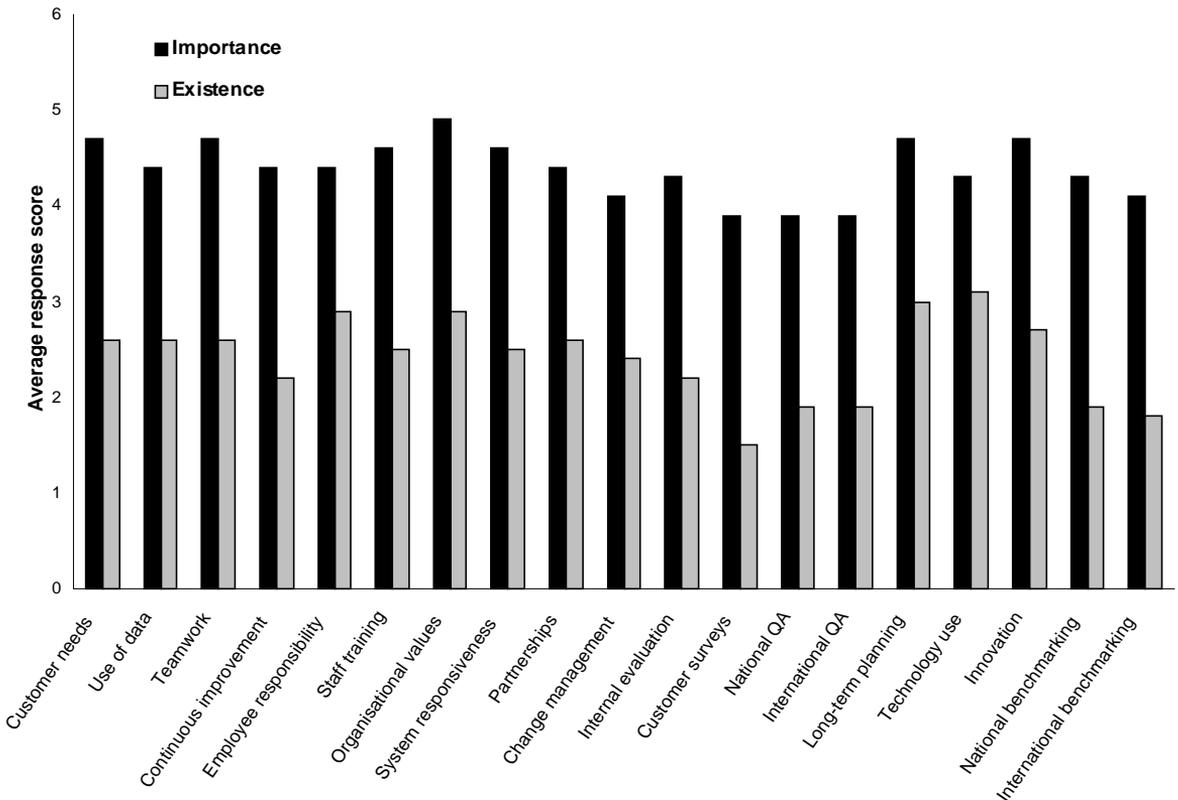
elements of university courses undertaken by some participants. Most respondents indicated that they had never undertaken any formal leadership training.

Some respondents' departments had undertaken institutional strengthening projects, funded through AusAID, which had focused on areas such as organisational structure, improving the efficiency of work practices, human resource development, establishing more regular and meaningful planning and reporting cycles, new approaches to information technology and enhancing external relations. Respondents believed that participation in these projects

had, to a degree, contributed to the development of their leadership and management skills.

Within the area of quality management one participant had undertaken a graduate diploma in general management, another had completed a masters degree in leadership and a third had undertaken a short computer course, although none of this experience could be directly linked to the areas of quality management. Thirteen respondents from the questionnaire and all those interviewed indicated that they had not undertaken any formal training in quality management.

Figure 1 Importance of, and existence of questionnaire attributes relating to PNG Public Sector organisations



These responses seemed to reflect an *ad hoc* and inconsistent approach to the professional development of these leaders who constitute an influential group within the public sector and have significant responsibility for implementing the reform process.

Conclusion

This research study has attempted to gauge the degree to which public sector departments in Papua New Guinea were perceived by the leaders of such departments to reflect the attributes of organisational quality as defined within the public sector quality movement. It also has attempted to identify challenges facing public sector leaders during the public sector reform process and to investigate issues of leadership development.

The areas where most progress was being made in the public sector generally seemed to be in strategic planning and the use of technology. Further, it was believed that some leaders had high expectations for their departments, utilised collaborative decisionmaking and understood their organisational purpose well, although these attributes were not perceived to be in existence generally.

It was clear, however, from the analysis of both the questionnaire and interview findings that public sector organisations have significant challenges in providing services to such a culturally and geographically diverse country. Political instability, diminishing resources, the lack of provincial infrastructure, privatisation, lack of ongoing training and development, attitudinal issues and staff commitment,

staff support and appraisal, transparency in policy decisionmaking, effective service delivery, gender equity in employment and promotion, and the need to address cultural barriers across district and provinces were identified as contributing to these challenges. The participants involved in the research, especially those who participated in the initial questionnaire, identified some serious concerns about the management of the public sector at the political level.

Overall, participants strongly supported the 36 attributes relating to organisational quality in public sector organisations as identified in the questionnaire but did not believe that these attributes were in existence to a large degree within the PNG Public Sector.

Areas of greatest concern to respondents included the identification and meeting of customer needs, the availability of staff training and professional development, the development of benchmarks for organisational improvement, and the ability of employees to adapt to the changing demands of the public sector. Concerns were also expressed about the skill level and attitude of many public sector staff and it was noted that significant training and development across a number of technical, managerial and organisational areas was needed to improve the situation.

There is no doubt that the limited number of questionnaires returned influenced the degree to which the findings represent reliable data in relation to public sector issues. Clearly it would have been desirable to have more responses across a larger range of public sector organisations to enable more in-depth analysis. The

relatively small number of participants completing the initial questionnaire limited the degree to which theoretical knowledge could be generated from the research, and the findings would need to be investigated in greater detail through further research. Despite these shortcomings, those who did respond seemed to welcome the opportunity to have their say, but seemed to do so on the expectation that the information from the research would be utilised in a practical way to generate improvement within the PNG Public Sector.

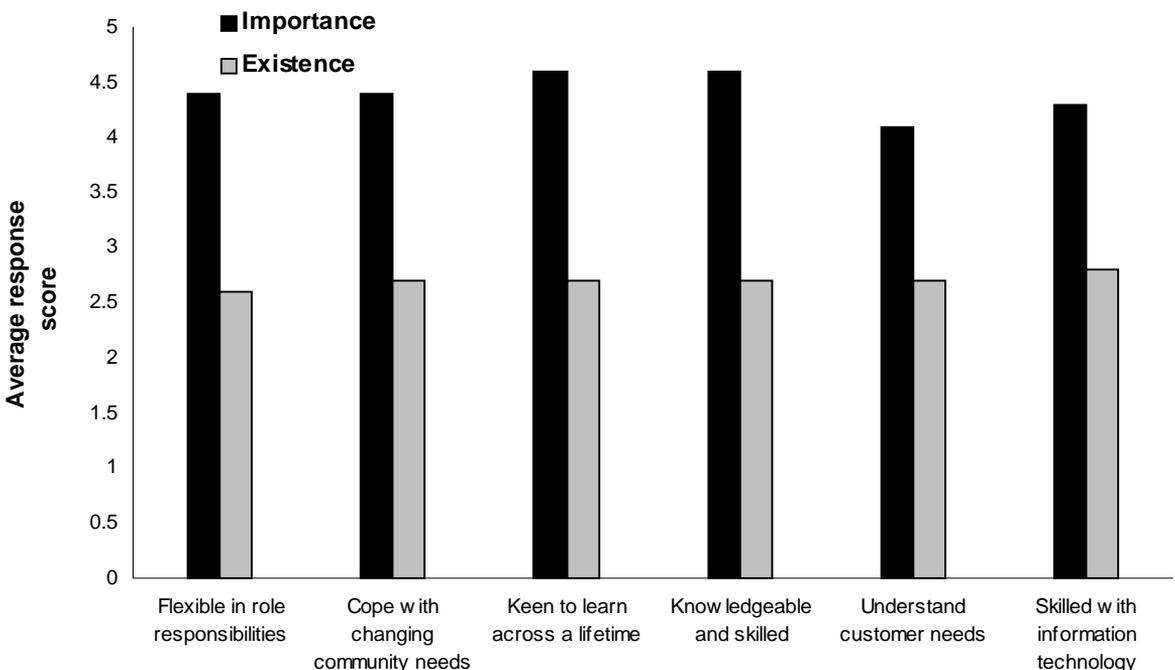
Being predominantly managerial in nature, the PNG Public Sector reforms, if successful, will induce in the PNG Public Sector some elements of organisational quality, particularly those associated with

organisational efficiency, as outlined in the nine reform objectives. Such a focus on efficiency could arguably be construed as necessary given the economic and political climate of the country as a whole.

The achievement of the broader, quality attributes on which the research questionnaire and interviews were based may depend on the capacity of leaders to reconceptualise the work of the public sector and align it with developments in the broader, public sector, quality movement, which could include

- effective, ongoing staff learning opportunities for public sector employees, especially in relation to fulfilling a significantly different role in the changing public sector

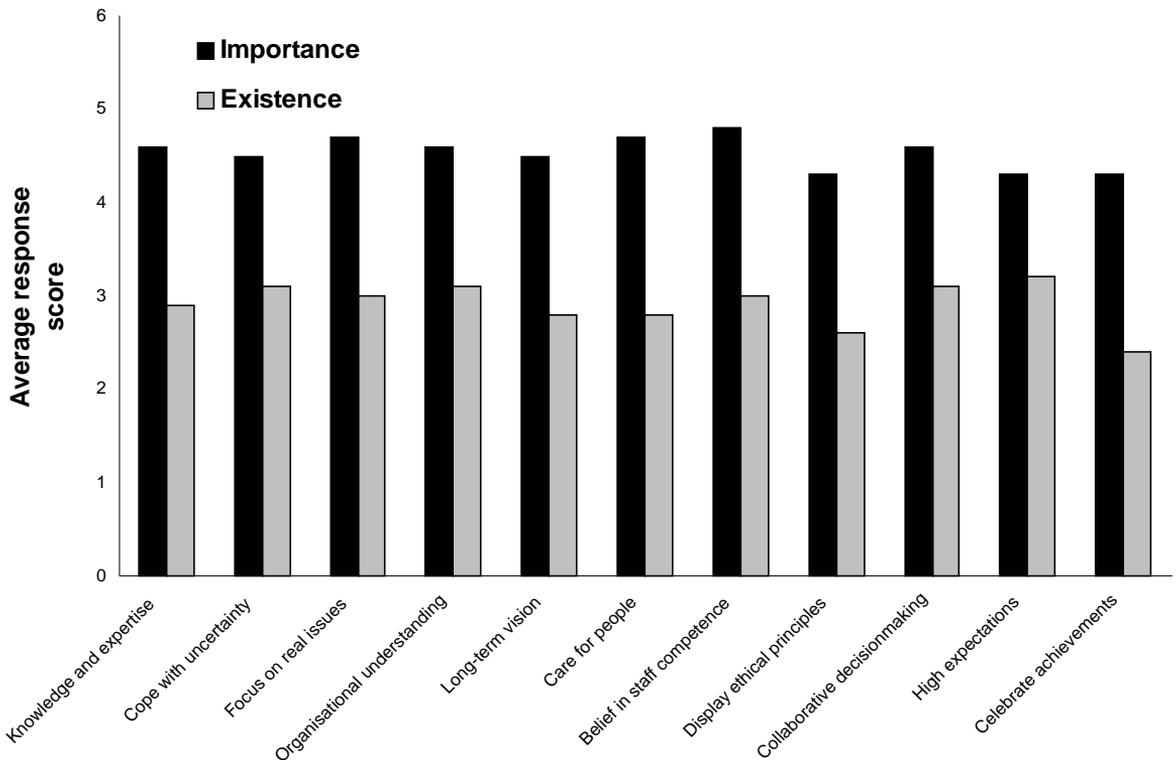
Figure 2 Importance and existence of questionnaire attributes relating to PNG Public Sector employees



- benchmarking key management and service delivery practices and processes against national and international best practices
- developing a client/customer focus, a knowledge of customer/client needs and customer relations strategies
- developing consistency of service delivery, particularly within provincial centres and rural areas
- finding reliable ways to measure service outcomes, customer satisfaction and broader organisational achievements
- working effectively with other sectors in developing service delivery systems.

Ultimately, the success of the public sector reform process may well depend on the capacity of the public sector to embrace cultural, behavioural and attitudinal change as much as the structural and organisation changes inherent in the action plans. This has implications for the role of organisational leadership at all levels and during all phases of the reform process, and indicates the need for further research, particularly case studies, to identify effective leadership strategies for those at the departmental, leadership level in managing the change process.

Figure 3 Importance and existence of questionnaire attributes relating to PNG Public Sector leaders



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Appendix 1

Leadership for quality research project

Initial questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gain information about the qualities of public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea. The questionnaire is made up of a list of possible attributes about public sector organisations. The questionnaire seeks to find out whether you think each attribute is important to public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea and also whether you think each attribute currently exists within such organisations.

Public sector organisations are defined as those large or small organisations which are mainly sponsored by the PNG government or volunteer agencies and which provide public services such as education, health, community development or welfare.

Leaders from a number of public sector organisations will be invited to complete this questionnaire because it is likely that these leaders will have an understanding of public sector organisations generally in Papua New Guinea.

This questionnaire will assist in providing an overview of leaders' perceptions of public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea and will provide a basis for other elements of the project to follow.

Questionnaire instructions

The questionnaire is in four sections: Section A, Section B, Section C and Section D.

To complete Sections A–C please circle the number between 1–5 which best indicates

- (a) your beliefs about the importance of this attribute to public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea, and
- (b) your beliefs about the current existence of this attribute in public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea.

Section D is made up of some open-ended questions, as well as a request for some details about your organisation. It would be much appreciated if as much detail as possible could be provided in Section D.

Section A

Attributes of PNG Public Sector organisations

Please circle the number that best describes your beliefs about (a) the importance and (b) the current existence of each attribute, using the following key:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 = unimportant/no existence | 4 = significant importance/existence |
| 2 = limited importance/existence | 5 = high importance/existence |
| 3 = some importance/existence | |

Degree to which this attribute	is important to PNG public sector organisations					exists in PNG public sector organisations				
	Importance					Existence				
	Low	High				Low	High			
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea generally demonstrate

1 a focus on the needs of the customer/client/public	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2 good use of data in making management decisions	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3 an emphasis on teamwork	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4 a commitment to continuous improvement of processes and services within the organisation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5 a high degree of employee responsibility for individual decisionmaking	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6 a high commitment to staff training	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7 clearly stated organisational values and purposes	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8 an ability to modify the system in response to changing needs	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
9 the existence of partnerships with other organisations rather than working in isolation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
10 an acceptance of change as a normal part of their existence	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
11 regular internal evaluations of processes and systems	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
12 surveys of customers regarding the quality of services provided	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
13 the use of national quality assurance standards	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
14 the use of international quality assurance standards (ISO 9000; Baldrige criteria, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
15 long-term strategic planning	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
16 a high focus on enhancing the use of technology	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
17 innovation and the encouragement of new ideas	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
18 benchmarking organisational performance against national best practice	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
19 benchmarking organisational performance against international best practice	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Section B**Attributes of public sector leaders in Papua New Guinea**

Please circle the number that best describes your beliefs about (a) the importance and (b) the current existence of each attribute, using the following key

1 = unimportant/no existence

2 = limited importance/existence

3 = some importance/existence

4 = significant importance/existence

5 = high importance/existence

Degree to which this attribute	is important to PNG public sector organisations					exists in PNG public sector organisations				
	Importance					Existence				
	Low	High				Low	High			
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Leaders in public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea

20 have a high level of knowledge and expertise in management	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
21 can cope with leading their organisations in times of ambiguity and uncertainty	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
22 Have the ability to maintain the focus on the real purpose of the organisation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
23 Have a good understanding of their organisation as a whole	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
24 Have a long-term vision for the future of their organisations	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
25 Care for the people who work in their organisations	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
26 Have a belief in the competence and professionalism of their staff	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
27 Set a personal example of moral and ethical principles	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
28 Work collaboratively with team members in organisational decisionmaking processes	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
29 Have high expectations for the success of the organisation in achieving its purposes	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
30 Recognise and celebrate the achievements of employees within the organisation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Section C

Attributes of public sector employees in Papua New Guinea

Please circle the number that best describes your beliefs about (a) the importance and (b) the current existence of each attribute, using the following key

- 1 = unimportant/no existence
- 2 = limited importance/existence
- 3 = some importance/existence

- 4 = significant importance/existence
- 5 = high importance/existence

Degree to which this attribute

is important to
PNG public
sector
organisations

exists in PNG
public sector
organisations

Importance

Existence

Low High
1 2 3 4 5

Low High
1 2 3 4 5

Employees in public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea are generally

31 flexible in being able to undertake a range of roles and responsibilities

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

32 able to cope with the changing needs of the community they serve

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

33 keen to continue to learn across a lifetime

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

34 knowledgeable and skilled to perform their duties

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

35 know the needs of their customers and clients well

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

36 skilled in the use of information technologies

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Please record any comments about public sector organisations in Papua New Guinea that you would like to make

Section D

What are some of the challenges currently facing your organisation?

In what areas, if any, would you like to see your organisation make improvements?

What previous leadership training, if any, have you experienced either within or outside your current organisation?

What training, if any, have you experienced in the area of quality management?

Details of your organisations

It would be appreciated if the following details could be provided about your organisation

Name of organisation:

Organisation type (for example Educational, Health, Welfare, Training, Legal, Community)

- Government sponsored • Non-government • Other: _____

Size of organisation:

Number of full time employees: _____

Part-time employees: _____

Number of branches/agencies/sites (a) in Papua New Guinea: _____

(b) outside Papua New Guinea: _____

Numbers of organisational members

National staff: _____

Volunteer staff: _____

Expatriate staff: _____

Female staff: _____

Part-time staff: _____

Appendix 2 Interview questions utilised during organisational visits

Organisational management

- What services does this organisation provide? Who are the organisations clients/ customers, stakeholders?
- What are some of the most difficult processes for management? Why is this so?
- How do you communicate with one another within the organisation? How effective is this?
- What kinds of data/information does the organisation use? How is this data generated?
- What kinds of technological changes are currently taking place within the organisation?
- What kinds of standards are used to judge the quality of your work?
- How well are you performing in relation to other service organisations?
- How do you know what is expected of you, your team, your organisation?
- How do you recognise/celebrate your achievements?

Staff performance

- What opportunities do you have in your current role to learn new skills? Do you have opportunities to learn from other employees within the organisation?
- Do employees work as a team, or within teams? What sort of teams and for what purposes?
- What sort of formal training and development have you participated in over the last year? Before this?
- How are the individual needs/concerns of employees addressed?

Leadership challenges

- What is the main purpose of the organisation?
- How does the organisation make decisions about policy?
- What significant structural/cultural changes have occurred in the organisation while you have been here? How has the organisation managed these changes?
- Who has responsibility for policymaking/decisionmaking within the organisation?
- How is the organisation influenced by the external/political environment?
- What international/global factors have influenced/are influencing this organisation?
- Does the organisation work in collaboration/partnership with other organisations in Papua New Guinea? Outside Papua New Guinea? Which ones and why?
- What are the long-term goals of the organisation?

General questions

- Are there other areas where your organisation is performing well?
- Are there areas where your organisation is underperforming?
- If you could improve some areas of your organisation to make the greatest difference, what would they be?