Public Sector Reform and Development

There are many schools of thought on how to carry out public sector transformation, based on business models such as Total Quality Management, Functional Review, or Alternative Service Delivery. However, Business Process Re-engineering, redefined as Government Process Re-engineering (GPR), involves a quantum leap in organisational transformation, differentiating this framework from other schools of thought which are more incremental in nature. It should also be noted that re-engineering demands government-wide commitment that crosses horizontal and vertical boundaries and is designed to break down ‘silos’ – Ministries or departments that work in isolation.

From BPR to GPR

BPR is the fundamental reconsideration and radical redesign of organisational processes, in order to achieve dramatic improvements of current performance in cost, speed, and quality of service” – Michael Hammer, Founder of BPR. GPR is the application of re-engineering within a government context; however, the underlying principles of BPR are universal and could be applied to any organisation.

Fundamental reconsideration – this goes back to the raison d’être of the organisation and asks questions such as – should government be operating in this industry? Could this function be conducted better outside government? Is this a core business for government?

Radical redesign – ‘thinking outside the box’ becomes part of the critical thinking process and the focus is on the customer. There are several techniques that can be applied to conduct a radical redesign, covered in more detail in the article.

Dramatic improvements – significant improvements in cost, time and speed are associated with GPR initiatives. In some instances, breakthrough improvements are established initially and incremental changes are applied on an ongoing basis to further refine redesigned processes.

Government Process Re-engineering

Anthony Ming of the Governance and Institutional Development Division at the Commonwealth Secretariat describes the application of Business Process Re-engineering to government reform.
The drivers for change are compelling and the reasons often cited for employing GPR include:

- **The global financial crisis** – the combination of reduction in revenues with a corresponding growth in expenditures has resulted in unsustainable budget deficits. Radical reviews are needed on the expenditure side of the ledger;

- **Putting citizens first** – transforming government to be more responsive to the needs of citizens, for instance bringing government closer to its citizens via online services, and making government more transparent;

- **Exploiting technology** – modern infrastructure, the internet, social networks and mobile telephones are being utilised to enhance the investment climate, attracting investors and making government more efficient and competitive.

The application of GPR is a critical and necessary prerequisite for the successful application of technology.

**Methodology**

Figure 1 gives an overview of the Process Re-engineering framework. Since GPR involves radical change, it is imperative to define a persuasive reason for undertaking such an initiative. The reason provides the basis for change management activities where staff must be sold on the new way of doing business and stakeholders need to understand the underlying rationale for change. In addition to a compelling reason, a strong and influential sponsor is required to lead the GPR initiative. Although GPR may be seen in some circles as a technology project, it is truly a government transformation process that must be led and driven by a non-ICT ministry or sponsor.

Mapping the current processes identifies where bottlenecks are occurring and reasons why these problems are occurring. It also provides a baseline to measure the level of improvements that have occurred at the end of the GPR exercise, and whether the GPR targets have been achieved.

The basic premise for the redesign phase is to develop processes that are customer focused, efficient, and reduce the number of ‘hand-offs’. It is important to understand that this phase drives the technological solution that will meet the needs of the redesigned processes. In addition, redesigned processes shape the organisation design and identify legislative changes that are required to support the new processes. There are a variety of techniques to redesigning processes:

- **Utopia pull** – start with a blank sheet of paper with no constraints to design the perfect solution. Then apply critical constraints to develop a pragmatic but dramatic design.

- **Enlightenment** – do not reinvent the wheel. Look at other jurisdictions for similar initiatives and learn from their mistakes and adopt best practices.

- **Rule-busting** – many rules and procedures have been around for a while with no rationale for their use. These are logical candidates for rule-busting.

- **Reduce hand-offs** – each hand-off increases the time it takes to process a transaction. Information should

"People need to know why change is necessary, what the benefits are and how they will be affected."

- **Enlightenment** – do not reinvent the wheel. Look at other jurisdictions for similar initiatives and learn from their mistakes and adopt best practices.

- **Rule-busting** – many rules and procedures have been around for a while with no rationale for their use. These are logical candidates for rule-busting.

- **Reduce hand-offs** – each hand-off increases the time it takes to process a transaction. Information should
be captured at source and employees empowered to make decisions.

There are several technological innovations that complement GPR:

- **The internet** – this ubiquitous tool is an open network-within-networks that is accessible to all. The internet creates a facility to allow governments to be more transparent and accountable to citizens.

- **Social media** – create a virtual meeting space to share information without filters and provide governments with the ability to interact with their constituents. This style of communication also facilitates pressure groups that could monitor government performance, leading to increased levels of governance and creating a critical mass to effect change.

- **Mobile phones** – by the year 2015 there will enough cellphones for each of the 7 billion citizens in the world. This innovation offers the opportunity for governments to leapfrog technology generations and provide government services on a readily available and affordable device.

**Change management**

Change management is probably the most difficult aspect of GPR. Getting people to shift from their comfort zone to an unfamiliar place requires discipline, dedication and above all else commitment from all levels of management. People need to know why change is necessary, what the benefits are and how they will be affected. There are many change management models floating around, however, there are key elements to any change process:

- **Clear vision** – the destination must be clearly defined with a road map that charts the course to be taken.

- **Compelling reason** – there has to be urgency in GPR initiatives with disastrous consequences for inaction.

- **Commitment from the top** – a strong coalition with influential leaders is required to set the right example and drive change within the organisation.

- **Quick wins** – identify ‘low hanging fruit’ and deliver these successes quickly to build momentum, credibility and demonstrate tangible progress.

- **Continuous communication** – constant communication with staff and key stakeholders (e.g. unions) is necessary to obtain buy-in and address concerns.

- **Institutionalise change** – to sustain change it must be inculcated into the entire organisation processes.

Performance management schemes should ensure that the new government model is rewarded and ‘no change’ behaviour is questioned.

Some organisations have good intentions initially as they embark on the GPR journey, however, many have applied re-engineering in a superficial manner because they have underestimated the level of effort required to successfully implement these radical changes and the level of resistance to change by employees and stakeholders.

To avoid this scenario, it is important that there is a compelling reason for change and a firm commitment by senior officials to support the initiative. The philosophy of ‘think big, start small and scale fast’ should be a central theme for re-engineering projects.

“Quick wins are necessary to create momentum, build credibility and demonstrate tangible progress.”

A clear vision that is succinctly articulated conveys a focused sense of purpose to the organisation. Quick wins are necessary to create momentum, build credibility and demonstrate tangible progress.

**Where GPR has brought results**

Singapore used GPR extensively during 2000-2006 to reinvent government and position Singapore as a global information communication hub, e-economy and e-society. During 2007 a survey was developed by Mr Albert Tan, Lecturer, Institute of Systems Science, National University of Singapore, and sent to private and public sector organisations.

Thirty-five surveys were returned:

- 52 per cent of respondents were government and 48 per cent private sector;
- 45 per cent indicated that their GPR projects had achieved target benefits or exceeded them; 46 per cent had difficulty quantifying their outcomes; 7 per cent did not achieve stated targets.

The Government of Guyana Revenue Authority re-engineered its organisation processes and obtained a 250 per cent increase in tax revenues with no loss of jobs.
The Government of Malta applied GPR to bring its ministries in line with the requirements to enter into the EU.

**GPR and governance**

According to the United Nations Development Programme, “Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective and equitable. And it promotes the rule of law. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources.”

A key element in governance is how information is disseminated and used to hold governments to account for their actions, and how information could create the impetus for change. Since GPR is focused on the citizens it transforms the traditional citizens-to-government relationship where governments provide inadequate information to protect vested interests.

“Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society.”

Re-engineering forces bureaucrats to completely rethink the way business is conducted and react to the demands made by their constituents. Information could be provided with ease of access through a public-facing portal, and the veracity of the information could be confirmed through a variety of means – for instance, companies who were successful in procurement opportunities, and media reports on government performance. The ability of citizens and other stakeholders to assess government performance creates necessary tension and pressures that force government to be more open and accountable. Re-engineering also leverages modern technologies to create virtual pressure groups that cross geographical and social barriers with a singular focus to effect change or hold politicians to account for their actions.

**Contact Details**

**Anthony Ming** worked with the Ontario Government for over 30 years. Since joining the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2008, Tony has led the development of the concept and architecture for the Mobile Commonwealth Connects Portal. He is the Managing Editor for IT for Development.

The Commonwealth Secretariat Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) works as a partner with all Commonwealth peoples, committed to providing excellent technical assistance for capacity building and sustainable development in public institutions in particular, and in private sector and civil society institutions with public responsibilities.

Governance and Institutional Development Division, Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7747 6350
Fax: +44 (0)20 7930 0827
Email: info@commonwealth.int
Website: www.thecommonwealth.org