Initial Implementation of the Executive Agency Model in Jamaica

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the impact of the initial eight executive agencies in Jamaica, through the use of both secondary and primary methods of data collection. The main findings of the study were five-fold: (i) positive changes had occurred in the studied organizations, following the attainment of the executive agency status; (ii) both organizational performance and the provision of services to customers had improved, as a result of the executive agency status; (iii) most clients surveyed were satisfied with both the performance and the provision of services by their respective executive agencies; however, (iv) issues relating to staff matters had mostly remained the same as before the conversion into executive agency; and (v) in the case of staff benefits, the situation had actually become worse after the attainment of the executive agency status.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The Executive Agency Model is one of the structural innovations of the New Public Management (NPM) movement, which was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1980s, with the intention of increasing administrative efficiency and productivity in service delivery within public institutions. While a lot has been researched on the impact of the Executive Agency Model in the United Kingdom (Cabinet Office 2006; Talbot, 2004; James, 2003; Gains, 1999), hardly any empirical research has been conducted in the Caribbean region where the Executive Agency Model, imported from the UK, has been implemented since the 1990s.

In the attempt to bridge the above mentioned gap, this study was designed to attain the following objectives: to establish the extent to which executive agencies in Jamaica had improved service delivery; to measure levels of change that had occurred in the studied executive agencies in Jamaica; to

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analyse the direction of those changes (whether positive or negative); and to provide policy recommendation for the way forward.

In order to attain the above objectives, two main methods of data collection were utilized in this study: secondary data analysis, through an examination of documents and reports relating to executive agencies studied; and primary data, through the use of a structured survey to solicit information from employees that worked in the eight studied organizations both before and after they converted into executive agencies. A structured survey was also administered to some of the clients of the studied executive agencies to solicit some of the required information.

Although most findings of the study indicated that positive changes had occurred in the studied organizations, following their conversion into executive agencies, evidence relating to staff benefits in the studied organizations indicated that the situation had actually become worse after the attainment of the executive agency status. Overall, the contribution of this paper to existing literature lies in its provision of objectively collected empirical evidence on the impact of the initial implementation of the Executive Agency Model in Jamaica.

The organization of the paper falls into four sections: the second section presents the literature review on the Executive Agency Model, both in the United Kingdom and in Jamaica; the third section is concerned with the analysis of both secondary and primary data on the studied executive agencies in Jamaica; and the fourth section summarizes conclusions drawn from the study and then provides policy recommendations.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.01   AN OVERVIEW OF THE INITIAL EXECUTIVE AGENCY MODEL IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Executive Agency Model was first introduced in UK in 1988, following the publication of a report entitled *Improving Management in Government,* by Sir Robin Ibbs, who was Efficiency Adviser to then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The Ibbs' report identified the following weaknesses in the civil service: too much emphasis on policy and too little on delivery; shortages of management skills in service delivery functions; too much emphasis on spending money and little on getting results; too much focus on short-term political priorities instead of long-term planning; and that the civil service was too big and diverse to be managed as a single organization (Ibbs, 1988).

The main recommendations made by the report to address the above mentioned shortcomings were three-fold: (i) executive agencies should be established, which would be semi-autonomous government institutions that would remain part of government but would have more responsibilities for their own management and performance; (ii) departments should ensure that their staff was properly trained in the delivery of services in order for the agency to maximize results; and (iii) each agency should be headed by a Chief Executive Officer, who would concentrate on the delivery of services, with a results oriented approach, rather than on policy.

Departments selected to be executive agencies were largely service delivery oriented. The first executive agency in the United Kingdom, the Vehicle Inspectorate, was established in August 1988.

By 1997, 76% of civil servants in UK were employed by executive agencies. The new Labour government further endorsed the establishment of executive agencies through its *Next Steps Report* in 1998, with emphasis on the following elements (Office of Public Service Reform, 2002: 58): ensuring that targets of agencies were sufficiently demanding; reporting achievements against targets in a clear and open

fashion; and encouraging agencies to compare the ways they do things with best practices found in equivalent organizations both within and outside the civil service.

The 2002 review of executive agencies in the UK titled: *Better Government Services: Executive Agencies in the 21st Century* provided the following characteristics that make executive agencies perform better than traditional departments (Office of Public Service Reform, 2002: 9-47): they are public organizations not by default but by minister's decision; they are responsible for the operational functions of government rather than the provision of policy advice; they manage identified set of resources effectively and efficiently; they have greater delegated freedom over self-generated income and the terms and conditions of their staff than traditional ministry departments; they are headed by Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), who are responsible to their respective ministers for the achievement of agreed targets; the responsibilities of the CEO and the performance required of the agency are set down formally and transparently in a framework document; the CEO and senior staff are on fixed term contracts and their continuity in employment is based on performance; they operate financial systems, which allow them to cost fully their services; they are customer focused and performance driven organizations; and they publish annual reports and accounts, including a review of performance against targets.

2.02   AN OVERVIEW OF THE INITIAL EXECUTIVE AGENCY MODEL IN JAMAICA

The Jamaican government identified some aspects of the Executive Agency Model that worked well in the UK and adopted them to the Jamaican situation. These included (Davies, 2001: 9): organizing the work of each department in a way that focuses on the job to be done, and enhancing the systems and structures to deliver policies and services effectively; effective management of each department to ensure that the staff has the relevant experience and the skills needed to do the tasks that are essential to efficient government; and sustained pressure to perform within each department for continuous improvements in the value for money obtained in the delivery of policies and services.

Executive agencies were established as a new way of managing the public sector by focusing on output, improving quality of service provided by essential agencies and by promoting the accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of central ministries (Coore-Johnson, 2000). The primary aim was to reduce central controls and to delegate authority to managers in the agencies, which would enable them to take decisions in the interests of their organizations.

Institutions targeted for executive agency status in Jamaica were those that delivered services mostly to the public and, to a less extent, to government. The Government selected the following institutions as pilot entities, which were converted into executive agencies on April 1, 1999: Management Institute for National Development (MIND), which is the main public sector training institution in Jamaica; Registrar General's Department (RGD), the only repository in Jamaica for birth, marriage and death records; Office of the Registrar of Companies (ORC), with the responsibility for the registration, monitoring and regulation of companies, and the Administrator General's Department (AGD), which is in charge of properties of persons who have died intestate, leaving minors as beneficiaries.

On April 1, 2001, four other institutions were also accorded executive agency status: the Jamaica Information Service (JIS), a government information agency that gathers and disseminates government policies and programmes, using full range of media skills (print, radio, television, graphic arts and video projection); the National Environmental and Planning Agency (NEPA), responsible for environmental management, land use planning, natural resources conservation and development; the National Land Agency (NLA), which constructs, operates, maintains and delivers the spatially referenced land related information and systems vital to all public sector users engaged in land management activities in Jamaica; and the National Works Agency (NWA), responsible for maintaining road network throughout Jamaica.

For each of the above agencies, the modernization process consisted of the following two steps. The first step involved the selection of the Chief Executive Officer and the core management team of the agency, on a competitive basis among candidates from both the public and private sectors. The second step involved the engagement of consultants with the required organizational, management, legal and other technical skills who, together with the CEO and the core management team, prepared documents to inform the modernization process of the agency (Government of Jamaica, 1997).

It has been argued that the establishment of executive agency in Jamaica has brought benefits to both the government and the public at large. According to Armstrong (2001: 54), the benefits of the executive agency model in Jamaica are four-fold. First, the public is receiving faster, more efficient and responsive services in more pleasant and courteous service environment. Second, agency staff is more involved in decision-making, working in better conditions, and their performance is recognized. Third, the country is improving its use of scarce resources, addressing citizens' expectations of better service levels. Fourth, executive agencies are increasing productivity levels, and obtaining greater transparency and more direct accountability. This study seeks to establish the extent to which the above and other related claims benefits have been attained by executive agencies in Jamaica.

3.0   COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

3.01   SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

This involved an analysis of documents relating to the eight executive agencies studied, paying particular attention to the changes that have occurred since these organizations were converted into executive agencies, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Improvements in service delivery since the agency status

Organization	Before Agency Status	After Executive Agency Status
Registrar General's Department (RGD)	Lacked autonomy.	Changes in management structure to create more organizational autonomy in financial and human resources matters (Government of Jamaica, 2001).
Office of the Registrar of Companies (ORC)	Inadequate information technology, resulting in backlogs.	Acquisition of more computers, creation of a website, creation of a help desk (Government of Jamaica, 2003).
Administrator General's Department (AGD)	Inadequate information technology	Acquisition of more computers for staff, installation of new software (Government of Jamaica, 2002).
Management Institute for National Development (MIND)	Limited course offerings & unstructured curriculum.	Offering new courses and customised training, 68 new computers placed in four training labs (Government of Jamaica, 2005).
National Land Agency (NLA)	Problems in service quality & inadequate customer service.	Introduction of Land Registration and Parcel Data Management system; System and Information Technology Training.
National Environment Planning Agency (NEPA)	A manual tracking system for applications which involved three separate tracking systems.	Electronic tracking system designed for online processing and tracking of all applications (Government of Jamaica, 2004).
Jamaica Information Service (JIS)	Lack of adequate management & qualified staff & ad hoc work style.	Increased use of information technology; improved financial and administrative management; training programmes for staff
National Works Agency (NWA)	Lack of efficient communication network, both internally and externally	Establishment of communication offices in all four regions of the country; monthly community meetings held across the island to keep citizens informed about the activities of the agency

Source: Annual various Reports and other Documents on Executive Agencies Studied

Apart from organizational improvements since agency status, some executive agencies have actually expanded their services for the benefit of their customers. Below are examples of such agencies.

MIND: MIND has sought to offer a wide range of academic and training programmes. One of the newest academic offering is the Associate Degree in Public Sector Management, which is taught at the institution's campus located in Mandeville. The new course is targeted at Public Sector workers, even though private sector employees could also do the programme if they satisfied the matriculation criteria (Government of Jamaica: 2005).

ORC: The ORC offers customers a wide range of services most of which are available online at the agency's website which is utilized to inform, educate, and guide customers. A customer can use the website from anywhere in the world and can save a lot of time and money. The following services are available: company name search, registration of business names, registration of particulars of Directors, registration of registered office notices, filing of change of Directors, view listing of documents, view charges register, view company information details and view documents online (Government of Jamaica, 2003).

RDG: The RGD has introduced a number of new and innovative services for its customers. These include an express service, registry of wedding service, genealogy research, a mobile customer service unit and a special services unit. These services provide customers with reduced turn around times. However, customers may have to pay more to reflect the true cost of the services that are provided (Government of Jamaica, 2001).

3.02   PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS

During the months of January through May 2004, two types of survey were conducted in the eight executive agencies in Jamaica. In the first survey, the Personnel Officers of all eight agencies were given questionnaires to be distributed to their respective staff who worked in the organizations before they were converted into executive agencies and were still working there at the time of the survey. These respondents were targeted simply because they were the only ones who could tell whether there had been changes in these organizations since the conversion into executive agencies. Overall, 212 of the targeted 282 respondents returned filled questionnaires. This constituted a response rate of 75%.

The second type of survey was conducted among clients of the executive agencies studied. A Research Assistant visited these agencies and interviewed some clients on their exit after conducting business in respective agencies. In particular, clients were requested to indicate their levels of satisfaction with a variety of services provided by respective agencies. Overall, 94 clients were interviewed.

3.2.1   A SURVEY OF EXECUTIVE AGENCIES STAFF IN JAMAICA

The questionnaire for the survey was completed by members of staff who were working in their organizations before they were converted into executive agencies and were still working in the same organizations at the time of the survey.

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
21-30 years	44	27%
31-40 years	65	39%
41-50 years	38	23%
51-60 years	19	11%
Total	**166**	**100%**

As indicated in Table 2, respondents were generally young; 65% of them (n=166) being 40 years and below. The modal age group category was 31-40 years (39%). Most of the respondents (66%, n=203) were female.

Table 3: Highest level of education attained by respondents

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary Certificate	45	22%
Post-secondary certificate	76	39%
Bachelor's degree	40	21%
Masters degree	15	08%
Other	19	10%
Total	**195**	**100%**

The modal educational category was post-secondary certificate (39%, n=195), followed by secondary certificate (22%) and then Bachelor's degree (21%).

Table 4: How many years have you served in your organization?

Number of years served	Frequency	Percentages
1-5 years	83	41%
6-10 years	67	33%
11-15	26	13%
16 years & over	27	13%
Total	**203**	**100%**

Majority of the respondents (59%, n=203) had served in their respective organizations for more than six years, with 26% having served for more than 11 years.

Table 5: Position of respondents within the organizational hierarchy

Position	Frequency	Percentage
Top managers	008	04%
Middle managers	023	11%
Junior managers	025	13%
Non-managerial position	135	68%
Other	008	04%
Total	**199**	**100**

The modal position category among respondents was the non-managerial position (68%, n=199), with managers constituting only 28%. Realizing that most of the high managerial positions in these agencies were filled at the time of the conversion into executive agency, their occupants could not qualify to be respondents in this survey, which targeted the staff that served both before and after the conversion into executive agency status.

Table 6: Level of change within the agency since executive agency status

Level of change	Frequency	Percentage
Very little has changed	22	11%
Some changes	64	31%
significant changes	51	24%
Very significant changes	71	34
Total	**208**	**100%**

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of change that had occurred in the operations of their organizations since they were converted into executive agencies. As indicated in Table 6, majority of respondents (58%) felt that significant changes had occurred within their organizations since they were converted into executive agencies.

Before cross tabulations were computed, the categories "very little has changed" and "some changes" were combined to constitute a general category "limited change". The categories "significant changes" and "very significant changes" were also combined to constitute a general category "fundamental change".

Using cross tabulation results, the level of fundamental change was slightly more pronounced among female respondents (60%, n=131) than among male respondents (57%, n=68). However, the level of fundamental change was much more pronounced among respondents who had served their organizations for 16 years and over (67%, n=27) than respondents that had served for only 1-5 years (45%, n=82), implying a positive relationship between the variables length of service and level of sensitivity towards change within the agency.

Similarly, the level of fundamental change was generally more pronounced among older than among younger respondents, as follows: 21-30 year olds (54%, n=41); and 51-60 year olds (61%, n=18).

With respect to levels of education, there was an element of inverse relationship. The level of fundamental change was more pronounced among respondents with secondary school certificate (70%, n=43) than among respondents with either Bachelor's degree (58%, n=40) or masters degree (53%, n=15).

Table 7: What has been the direction of changes that have taken place?

Direction of change	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	147	**70%**
Negative	026	**12%**
Both positive & negative	020	**10%**
Other	016	**08%**
Total	**212**	**100%**

Respondents were requested to indicate whether the changes that had occurred were positive or negative. Most respondents (70%, n=212) felt that the changes that had occurred since their organizations converted into executive agencies were positive. This position was supported by 74% of male respondents (n=68) and 71% of female respondents (n=132).

Based on tenure of service, 74% of respondents (n=27) who had served longest in their organizations (16 years and over) felt that changes had been positive, and so did 69% of respondents who had served for only 1-5 years (n=82).

With respect to educational background, 75% of respondents with secondary school certificate (n=44) felt that the changes had been positive, so did 70% of respondents with Bachelor's degree (n=40) and 73% of master's degree respondents (n=15). In terms of age groups, 70% (n=43) of the young respondents (21-30 years) felt that changes had been positive, and so did 67% (n=18) of the oldest age group in the survey (51-60 years).

Before and After Executive Agency Status Comparison

Based on their experiences, respondents were requested to compare some items relating to their organization before and after they converted into executive agencies. This was intended to measure the impact of the executive agency model on the daily functioning of the organizations involved. The items utilized in the measurement fell into three main categories: (i) items relating to provision of services to customers, (ii) items relating organizational achievements, and (iii) items relating to staff issues.

Items relating to provision of services to customers: Respondents were requested to indicate whether the quality and quantity in the provision of services to customers were better than before the conversion into the executive agency status, same as before, or worse than before. Table 8 shows the results.

At one extreme, 70% of the respondents (n=201) felt that the overall quality of services were better at the time of the survey than before the attainment of the executive agency status. At the other

extreme, only 22% of the respondents (n=188) felt that clients' attitude to user fees was better at the time of the survey than before the attainment of the agency status. The remainder of the items fell between these two extremes, as indicated in Table 8.

Table 8: Provision of services to customers before and after agency status

Item	Better now than before	Same as before	Worse than before	Hard to tell
Customer satisfaction	62% (n=198)	17%	07%	14%
Courtesy to customers	65% (n=208)	28%	01%	06%
Clients' use of services	59% (n=204)	20%	06%	15%
Easy to understand procedures	46% (n=198)	32%	08%	14%
Timeliness of services	60% (n=201)	23%	05%	12%
Clients' attitude to user fees	22% (n=188)	25%	21%	32%
Speed in processing documents	69% (n=204)	19%	03%	09%
Timely response to clients' complaints	56% (n=202)	20%	03%	20%
Overall quality of services	70% (n=201)	14%	05%	11%

Items relating to organizational achievements

Table 9: Organizational performance before and after agency status

Item	Better now than before	Same as before	Worse now than before	Hard to tell
Work productivity	71% (n=198)	14%	07%	08%
Attaining desired goals	56% (n=197)	19%	09%	16%
Being Accountable	57% (n=205)	26%	08%	09%
Being Transparent	44% (n=192)	28%	12%	16%
Overall organizational performance	62% (n=205)	14%	06%	18%

Whereas 71% of respondents (n=198) felt that work productivity was better at the time of the survey than before the conversion into executive agency status, only 44% (n=192) felt the same way in relation to transparency within the agency. The remainder of the other items measuring organizational achievements fell between these two extremes, as indicated in Table 9 above.

Items relating to staff issues

Table 10: Treatment of staff before and after the executive agency status

Item	Better now than before	Same as before	Worse now than before	Hard to tell
Staff training	58% (n=208)	19%	14%	09%
Physical working environment	54% (n=209)	32%	13%	01%
Job satisfaction	39% (n=200)	38%	20%	03%
Staff recruitment	29% (n=188)	21%	21%	29%
Staff salaries	51% (n=203)	17%	24%	08%
Staff benefits	23% (n=196)	19%	46%	12%
Management support for staff	30% (n=204)	33%	21%	16%
Management/staff relations	30% (n=200)	34%	24%	12%
Provision of incentives to staff	36% (n=198)	14%	32%	17%
Staff loyalty to the agency	36% (n=195)	24%	21%	19%
Staff dedication towards work	49% (n=208)	32%	08%	11%

By respondents' account, as indicated in Table 10, the treatment of staff had definitely become worse since the conversion of organizations into executive agencies. Out of eleven items assessed in Table 10, respondents felt that only three of them (staff training, physical working environment and salaries) had improved since the attainment of the executive agency status.

While most respondents felt that job satisfaction, managements' support for staff and management/staff relations had generally remained the same as they were before the executive agency status, it was generally felt that staff benefits had definitely become worse since the attainment of the agency status.

3.2.2   A SURVEY OF CLIENTS OF EXECUTIVE AGENCIES IN JAMAICA

Based on individual experiences, respondents were requested to indicate their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with services provided by their respective executive agencies. The items utilized in the questionnaire fell into two main categories: (i) items relating to agency's provision of services to clients, and (ii) items relating to the organizational performance of the agencies.

Items relating to the performance of executive agencies

Table 11: Clients' levels of satisfaction with performance of agencies

Item	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Total
Productivity	09% (n=88)	19%	**53%**	19%	100%
Accountability	06% (n=87)	17%	**61%**	16%	100%
Transparency	04% (n=84)	17%	**59%**	20%	100%
Efficiency	06% (n=88)	19%	**49%**	26%	100%
Physical environment	01% (n=92)	02%	**59%**	38%	100%
Processing of documents	14% (n=91)	17%	**48%**	21%	100%

As shown in Table 11, most respondents were satisfied with all items utilized to measure organizational performance. Combining the values of the response categories "satisfied" and "very satisfied" in Table 11, the item with which respondents were most satisfied was the physical environment within which executive agencies operated (97%, n=92), and the item with which respondents were least satisfied was the speed in processing documents within the studied agencies (69%, n=91).

Items relating to provision of services to clients

Table 12: Clients' levels of satisfaction with service provision

Item	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Total
Courtesy to clients	02% (n=92)	08%	41%	**49%**	100%
Clients' use of services	03% (n=80)	11%	**66%**	20%	
Clients' attitude to user fees	10% (n=72)	26%	**46%**	18%	100%
Response to clients' complaints	07% (n=82)	18%	**58%**	17%	100%
Easy to understand procedures	02% (n=94)	13%	**60%**	25%	100%
Timeliness of services	12% (n=88)	21%	**52%**	15%	100%
Quality of services	08% (n=93)	15%	**58%**	19%	100%
Clients' satisfaction	09% (n=91)	12%	**53%**	26%	100%

Most respondents were satisfied with all items assessed in Table 12. When the values of response categories "satisfied" and "very satisfied" were combined, the item with which respondents were most satisfied was the courtesy that agency staff paid to clients (90%, n=92), and the item with which respondents were least satisfied was clients' attitude to user fees charged by the studied agencies (64%, n=72).

4.0   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of documents collected from the studied executive agencies, it is clear that some improvements had been made since the attainment of the agency status up to the time of the study, including: the production of annual reports by agencies; improved customer service; increased revenue, resulting from greater efficiency in the use of available resources; greater access to services by customers, resulting from decentralization of those services through regionalization by some agencies; and greater use of technology, especially computers, resulting from demand driven training of staff.

In addition to the above, three conclusions can be drawn from results of the staff survey. *First*, most respondents felt that positive changes had occurred in the studied organizations since the attainment of the executive agency status (Tables 6 and 7). *Second*, most respondents felt that both organizational performance and provision of services to customers had improved since the attainment of the executive agency status (Tables 8 and 9). *Third*, respondents, however, felt that the treatment of staff mostly remained the same as before the conversion into executive agency, and that in the case of staff benefits the situation had actually become worse after the attainment of the executive agency status (Table 10).

In relation to the clients' survey, most respondents were satisfied with all items utilized to measure both organizational performance of studied agencies (Table 11) and agencies' provision of services to their respective clients (Table 12).

This paper contributes to the policy implication in a number of ways. *First*, although executive agencies in Jamaica had a measure of success, as reflected by the assessments of respondents in the two surveys conducted for this study, a level of dissatisfaction was expressed by staff of the agencies surveyed towards the overall treatment of staff, especially in relation to staff benefits. This level of dissatisfaction on the part of staff may have the following adverse consequences within executive agencies: poor personnel morale and decline in work effort; difficulties in recruiting and retaining technical and professional staff; non-transparent forms of remuneration by staff; and strong incentives to use public office for private gain. It is, therefore, recommended that executive agencies in Jamaica should be more sensitive towards the needs of their staff, especially in relation to staff benefits.

Second, there should be free flow of information and transparency between managers of executive agencies and members of the public, including scholars who seek to evaluate the performance levels of these agencies. For, as Armstrong has rightly argued (2001: 69), the executive agency model can only be sustained by building citizen engagement over time and ensuring that there is a supportive public service in place.

Third, given the fact that the executive agency model requires ample technical and human resource skills, both of which are scarce in developing countries, it is hereby recommended that the Jamaican Government should seriously assess and plan how to acquire these requisites before completely embracing the Executive Agency Model. Like any other reform model, the success of the Executive Agency Model depends significantly on high skilled personnel who are capable and prepared to support the reform initiative.

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