

## **Human Resource Management Practices and Organizational Performance in Public Sector Organizations: with reference to Development Officers in the Colombo District in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

Human resources management concerns how people are employed, utilized, and maintained effectively and efficiently in achieving organizational objectives. The performance of any organization largely depends on its human resources. Among the human resources management practices, recruitment, and selection of the right pool of employees, proper training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation directly affect achieving organizational objectives. However, these Human Resource (HR) practices in the public sector, especially in relation to the position of Development Officers (DOs) of Sri Lanka have not been practiced in an effective manner. Recruitment of Graduates as Development Officers has been a major reason for increasing the growth of public service in the country. Since the 1990s, the government of Sri Lanka has practiced bulk recruitment of graduates without having a clear and formal duty list, service minutes, recruitment procedures, training and development programs, promotion policy, and salary scale. The main purpose of this study is to discuss the existing Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, identify strengths and weaknesses of the existing HRM practices, and examine how these weaknesses affect the performance of the public sector organizations in relation to Development Officers in the public sector in Sri Lanka. The study used a qualitative research method with the inductive approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews from all 13 Divisional Secretaries in the Colombo District and the data were analyzed narratively. The study revealed that the existing recruiting, training, and performance appraisal practices negatively affect the performance of the public sector due to some weaknesses in these practices. Finally,

this study proposes policy recommendations for improving the effectiveness of these practices for enhancing the public sector performance in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Human resource management practices, Development officers, Public sector, Sri Lanka

## **1. Introduction**

Human Resource Management (HRM) is a significant function in any organization to achieve organizational objectives in a successful manner. Some human resources practices of the private sector may not be equally applicable to the public sector organizations as they differ from private sector organizations, in terms of the nature of services provided, the characteristic difference of public sector employees, and the difference in the way of managing finance (Kalleberg et al., 2006). When concerning the public sector, improving productivity through empowering employees is significant as it ultimately affects the overall economic growth of the country (Dissanayake & Jayatilake, 2019). Even though several researchers have confirmed a positive relationship between HR practices and performances in their studies (Guest, 1997; Vlachos, 2008) there is a lack of empirical studies in examining the HR practices in the public sector, particularly in Sri Lanka.

### **1.1. Background of the Study and Problem Identification**

There is a dearth of research in relation to HRM practices and job performances in the public sector in Sri Lanka. Human Resource Management in the public sector of Sri Lanka is somewhat complicated, especially in recruitment, training and development, and performance appraisal. The Sri Lankan public service is one of the largest in the world, and many institutions and organizations in the public sector of the country are overstaffed (Secretariat for Senior Ministers Government of Sri Lanka, 2012).

Enrollment of Graduates as Development Officers has been one of the major reasons for the growth of the public service in recent years. Out of the total number of public officers, 41,668 are Development Officers. (The Auditor General Department, 2018). Out of the number of Development Officers, a proportion of 74.9 percent is female officers and male officers are less in proportion: 25.1 percent (The Auditor General Department, 2018). The government has appointed 60,000 new unemployed graduates since the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2021 with the aim of reducing graduates' unemployability. Sri Lanka has more than 1 million public service cadres. Specifically, it is 1,216,549 which represents 14.9% of the total employed population of Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics, 2019). The following table shows the Employee - Population Ratio concerning public employees in Sri Lanka.

**Table 1: Employee/ Population Ratio in Sri Lanka**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Population (million)</b>	<b>Total Public Employees</b>	<b>Ratio = Employees/ Population</b>
<b>2012</b>	20.43	1,279,849	1:23
<b>2014</b>	20.79	1,302,258	1:16
<b>2016</b>	21.20	1,353,318	1:16
<b>2018</b>	21.67	1,370,633	1:16

Source: Samarathunga, (2021)

The Employee/ Population ratio indicates the efficiency of the labor market. The above-shown situation can be stated as inefficient because this ratio in 2018 implies that, one public officer exists for every 16 people.

Sri Lanka has achieved the doubtful distinction of having the highest per capita staffing rate in South Asia, and one of the highest in the developing world (Priyantha, 2007). Due to overstaffing, employees' morale decreases, and it negatively affects the overall performance of the public sector. Central Bank reports of Sri Lanka over the years have revealed that the continuous recruitment of the public sector has caused an increase in public expenditure and decreased the performance of the public sector. The following table shows how the government expenditure on salaries and wages accumulated with a pension has increased over the past years and how it has increased as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Government Revenue.

**Table 2: Government expenditure on salaries and wages (Rs. million)**

	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Salaries and Wages	576,471	588,518	626,045	686,452
Pensions	171,903	181,059	194,495	227,669
Total	748,374	769,577	820,540	914,121
<i>As a Percentage of the GDP</i>				
Salaries and Wages	4.80%	4.40%	4.40%	4.60%
Pensions	1.40%	1.40%	1.40%	1.50%
Total	6.20%	5.80%	5.80%	6.10%
<i>As a Percentage of Government Revenue</i>				
Salaries and Wages	34%	32%	33%	36%
Pensions	10%	10%	10%	12%
Total	44%	42%	43%	48%

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, (2019)

As per the above table, there is a continuous increment of government expenditure on public sector employees' salaries and wages and pension expenditure. The level of salaries and wages by 2019 has increased by 19% than 2016. The pension expenditure has increased by 24% as of 2019 than in 2016. One of the main reasons for this is the

continuous increase in recruitment to the public sector. Due to the new recruitment program started by a recent government in 2020, a significant increment in salaries and wages occurred at the end of 2021.

This increment of government expenditure on salaries, wages, and pension payments has added pressure continuously on government revenue as well. According to recent data, nearly half of government revenue is spent on salaries, wages, and pensions. As a payment for retired government officials, the pension payment also consumes a high portion of government revenue, and it is the largest in household transfer expenditure (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019).

The expenditure on salaries, wages, and pension payments has increased significantly over the years and this increase in public sector recruitments and upward revisions in salary and pension payments contributed to the increase in salaries wages, and pension payments by 11.4 percent in 2019 over the previous year and 30% out of total public expenditure and 10% of household transfers (as pensions) are accounted for the payments for public officers (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019). Therefore, a total of 40% of government expenditure is allocated to public officials.

Apart from that, the government recruited 60,000 new unemployed graduates to the state sector in 2020. Problems regarding unemployed and underemployed graduates in Sri Lanka are not a new phenomenon, which has been reported since 1960. Yet according to the economic specialists, this program has run without considering the economic feasibility of the government as it enhances the government expenditure by a higher rate. Graduates who have now joined the Government under different schemes, their contribution to productivity is low and the schemes are also to be blamed for lack of coherence and depth of study (NHRDC, 2013). According to the findings of NHRDC (National Human Resource Development Council of Sri Lanka) (2013), graduates were recruited without existing vacancies but by creating vacancies in the government sector. It had been informed that the organization has the possibility of functioning efficiently with permanent employees, and it had been highlighted that these graduate trainees are just adding a cost to the ministry rather than gaining any benefit. These graduate trainees are recruited to the public service as Development Officers (DOs) for permanent posts. Accordingly, many unemployed graduates who have only fulfilled the eligibility requirements, have been recruited. "The required educational qualification is a degree from a university recognized by the University Grants Commission, the graduates who have graduated from internally and externally through government universities, private universities, and higher education institutes have been eligible for recruitment as DO's. At the same time, he/she should be an unemployed graduate at that moment, age limit should be 21-45 years. Another disappointing factor in promotion is based on seniority rather than considering merit performances (Samaratunge & Bennington, 2014). This is a major reason for the low performance in public services. Though public service capacity

building is critical for the management of the development process, sufficient funds are not allocated to the extent needed (Secretariat for Senior Ministers Government of Sri Lanka, 2012) and no proper training programs are conducted particularly for the DOs. Most of the DOs are attached to the Divisional Secretariats (DSs) in Sri Lanka. The administrative system in Sri Lanka has five levels of governance structures - national, provincial, district, divisional, and village, and they function under a strong centralized system. Among them, Divisional level government functions have been implemented through Divisional Secretariats (DSs) which is the grassroots-level administrative unit that delivers more than 90 percent of the government services directly to the citizens. Apart from extending services to the public, the DSs are responsible for directing and coordinating all the development activities taking place in the division and many other ministries and departments provide their services through the Divisional Secretariat making the most common, grass root level citizen delivery point (ICTA, 2022).

The main objective of this study is to highlight the existing human resource management practices and identify the strengths and weaknesses of these practices. This study is limited to the selected human resources management practices relevant only to the position of development officers.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature review section discusses the concept of Human Resource Management (HRM), practices, and HRM in the public sector and how HRM affects organizational performance.

### **2.1. Human Resource Management and Organizational Performance**

HRM can be simply defined as "a part of the management process that specializes in the management of people in work organizations. Employees are the primary resource for gaining sustainable competitive advantage, human resources activities which need to be integrated with the corporate strategy, and human resource specialists help organizational controllers to meet both efficiency and equity objectives" (Bratton & Gold, 1994). If the organization wants to achieve its strategic objectives as they were determined, the corporate strategies should align with the human resource activities of the organization. HRM involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and employees (Beer et al., 1984).

HR practices are considered as an enhancer of the level of employee performance and the employees feel more comfortable and secure where HR practices are implemented (Saleem & Khurshid, 2014). Performance is one of the most considerate factors of any organization, private or public. Accordingly, employees' performance refers to

the actions and behavior which are performed under several restrictions, and which ultimately help to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Empirical evidence has indicated that there is a considerable relationship between Human Resource Management and organizational performance. Saleem and Khurshid (2014) have identified Merit-based Recruitment and selection; Performance-based Compensation, Organizational Commitment, and Training and Development as the key factors which affect organizational performance. Recruitment and selection play a significant role in hiring competent employees for better future performance at the workplace. Training and development opportunities with the organization ensure effective employee performance. The more the employees are committed to the company, the better for organizations to have an efficient and effective performance of employees at the workplace. Organizations shall remunerate and maintain internal compensation-based equity among various designations.

Krausert (2009) has identified the reward system of the organization's policy, staffing, and development decisions as key dimensions that impact current and future organizational performances. Vlachos (2008) also identified compensation policy, decentralization, self-managed teams, information sharing, selective hiring, training, and informed decisions that affect positively the overall performance of the organization.

Selection and Recruitment involve getting the right person on the right spot (matching the employee skill with organizational structures) who contributes to higher productivity and increased market value of the company (Mangaleswaran & Srinivasan, 2010). Successful selection should reduce staff turnover and ease the promotion process as well (Peters et al., 1998). Formal and effective selection and recruitment are very important in any organization.

Available empirical studies indicated that there is a positive relationship between recruitment and selection and organizational performance. Gamage (2014) discovered a positive association between recruitment and selection and business performance. People and their collective skills, abilities, and experience, coupled with their ability to deploy these in the interests of the employing organization can be recognized as key factors which help in achieving organizational success and competitive advantages.

Training and development enhance the quality of human resources. The purpose, in the work situation, is to develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy the current and future needs of the organization (Mangaleswaran & Srinivasan, 2010). One of the main objectives of training and development is to help employees achieve their full potential in the organization (Schuster, 1985).

Employee development means to develop the abilities of an individual employee and the organization as a whole and the success or the failure of the organization depends on the employee performance therefore, organizations are highly investing in

employee development (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). The authors identified three factors that encourage employee development: the organizational culture encourages employees to participate in decision-making, the sincere and committable attitude of top management, availability of opportunities for promotion. When employees are more developed, they are more satisfied with the job and more committed to the job, hence performance would increase. Also, when organizations are contributing towards employee development activities, the employees work hard; and utilize their full skills and efforts to achieve the goals of the organizations.

### **3. Methodology**

The study used the qualitative research method. The study area was the Divisional Secretariat Offices in Sri Lanka, which has about 331 Divisional Secretariats in the whole country. Primary data were gathered from the Divisional Secretaries. Therefore, the total population of the study was 331 Divisional Secretaries in Sri Lanka. Among them, a sample of 13 Divisional Secretaries (the Colombo District has a total of 13 Divisional Secretariat Offices) in Colombo District was selected for this study as it records the highest rate of public sector employment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews from all 13 Divisional Secretaries of the Colombo District and the data were analyzed narratively to address the research objectives.

### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

This section discusses the existing HR practices in the public sector, identifies the strengths and weaknesses of those practices, and examines how these weaknesses affect the performance of the public sector organizations in relation to the Development Officers based in the Colombo District in Sri Lanka. This study is not focused on the entire human resources management process in the public sector, but this discussion is limited only to recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation and benefits practices.

#### **4.1. HR Practices in the Public Sector of Sri Lanka**

The performance of the Divisional Secretariat can be defined as the successful implementation of public policies within the stipulated time while providing a quality service. It could be measured in terms of planning and completing development projects within a stipulated period with a lesser number of complaints against the DS office while delivering a speedy service to the public.

**a) *Recruitment and Selection***

Recruitment of Development Officers (DOs) are done by the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs and the Divisional Secretaries do not have the authority to select and recruit. The recruitment of the DOs is based on an interview, and it has always been done as a bulk recruitment. Normally, before the government announces the recruitment of DOs, a ground-level work-study is conducted by the DS officers to identify the number of requirements of the position and duties that will be assigned to these positions. After the collection of the information from all ground-level officers, the Ministry of Home Affairs summarizes the data and approves the recruitment.

Graduates are recruited as Dos, however, in practice, it has always been done as a bulk recruitment. Academic qualifications for the recruitment that a candidate should have a degree. Having observed basic information, such as age, and completion date of the degree, the applications are called by the government. After the recruitment, one-year training is given. After the training, the DOs are recruited to a permanent position in the public service.

**b) *Training and Development***

Several training programs are being carried out related to national policies, circulars, rules and regulations, structure of the government, code of conduct, financial regulation, accounting, land laws, and outbound training for employee mental health to provide knowledge relating to the government sector. However, there is no specific training and development criteria or procedure relating to DOs. As the DOs do not have a prescribed specific duty list, they are not responsible for specific duties like other permanent officers but assist other officers' work. A limited amount of funds are allocated for training purposes by the Government to the Divisional Secretariat Office Vote Account. The Divisional Secretary has the responsibility of how to spend the given funds for training programs.

Even though the DOs are entitled to have pieces of training, most of the DOs have not received any training or even any induction program. Some DOs have received several training courses related to development activities. Such training includes preparing project proposals and evaluation projects. Normally, the training programs for the DS officers are conducted within the office and funds are allocated from the District Secretariat. Apart from those training programs, some other special training programs are organized by external organizations such as the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration on special topics. But they are not, especially for the DOs, and also not for all Dos, only a few can have the opportunity to participate. Since these training programs are organized by the Divisional Secretaries, these programs are not identical and differ from Secretariat to Secretariat.



**c) *Performance Appraisal***

Performance appraisal is conducted according to the common performance evaluation method for all government officials. It is a primary evaluation of employee performance on their behavior, attendance, and discipline. It evaluates the employee performance in terms of their attendance (whether the officer attends the duties in a timely manner), whether the officer serves in essential times, discipline, time management, documentation capacity, etc. The evaluation is done by the immediate supervisor and the performance appraisals matter in the case of recommending increments. However, the performance evaluation is not being carried out in a serious manner considering promotions, training and developments, scholarships, and compensation. To measure performance, a specific task should be delegated to the officers, and a proper mechanism should be placed in order to measure the work seriously.

**d) *Compensation and Benefits***

There are some specialties in the government compensation system. All the government officials are entitled to a pension, an insurance policy called Agrahara, leaves, etc. All the officials including DOs are entitled to these benefits. Salary is a fixed amount and is paid under any circumstances. Even during the pandemic situation, the salaries were paid for all public servants including the DOs. The increment is based on their annual performance evaluation and performance at Efficiency Bar (EB) examinations. In the case of DOs, there is an issue as they do not try harder to pass the EB examination since their promotion scheme is unclear. Normally, they all benefit from the increment, because they are not normally evaluated by their performance in a proper manner. DOs are not entitled to overtime payments as most of the DOs are working in the field, hence, there is no proper mechanism to measure their attendance. Also, the DOs are not satisfied with the compensation and benefits as they are remunerated with a relatively lower salary.

**4.2. Strengths and weaknesses of the existing HRM practices**

The strengths and weaknesses of the selected HR practices in relation to the position of Development Officers in the public sector will be discussed in the proceeding section.

**a) *Recruitment and Selection***

As DOs are recruited without a previously identified set of duties, and not assigned related to their subject knowledge, there is a mismatch between the position, relevant field of studies and qualification, and the assigned duties. Out of the employed population of the public service (Government and Semi-Government Sector), around

4 percent of development officers are employed (The Auditor General Department, 2018). More than 86 percent of the Development Officers enrolled were Arts Graduates and nearly a proportion of 75 percent of those officers were female officers (The Auditor General Department, 2018). Even though the Development Officers Service is considered as a field occupation, about 22 percent work at offices and the number of field officers is 78 percent (The Auditor General Department, 2018). According to the stream of the Degree, 86% are Arts Graduates, 10% are Commerce Stream Graduates, 3% are Higher National Diploma Graduates and 0.35% are Other Subjects (The Auditor General Department, 2018). When recruiting and appointing, the graduates' specialized area is not considered.

As the DOs do not have a clear written or formal duty list, the authoritative parties face problems in delegating tasks to DOs. Lack of clear service minutes, improper recruitment procedures, promotional schemes, and salary scale discourage the DOs. They have no delegated power to perform a task. A majority of Development Officers employed in field duties report for the duties only a day or two a week to the Divisional Secretariat and at the same time sufficient space and office equipment are not available to the Development Officers and the authorized officers had expressed that the reservation of office space was practically impossible for the officers who report to the office once a week (The Auditor General Department, 2018).

The DOs do not have a clear recognition within the organization, which reduces the morale of the officers and leads to nurturing negative attitudes towards their careers and performance. Many DOs join the government service as their first appointment. However, due to these unpleasant situations and the lack of scope of the task to be performed, their first appointment itself becomes purposeless, and their attitudes towards their career development will collapse. They might not be able to go for a private sector job with that attitude and experience. Some DOs have a poor working culture and negative attitudes.

#### ***b) Training and Development***

Some training programs are important as some resource persons (mostly government officials) are willing to share their experiences and help to get new experiences and knowledge (knowledge on law revisions, circular revisions).

Training programs are informal and not focused particularly for the DOs. All are based on the decision of the respective Divisional Secretary. The scope and content of the training programs vary from one DS office to another.

There is no formal annual training. Divisional Secretaries cannot organize formal training for DOs, as there is no promotional scheme or delegated tasks. DOs will retire without carrier development.

Some training programs are not effective. After the training program, officers should give a chance to use that learned knowledge in practice, otherwise, the organizing cost, time, and resources become worthless. When considering externally organized training programs, that were not addressed the internal requirements of the Divisional Secretariat.

DS offices need to continue the service delivery simultaneously during the training programs which creates a barrier to running the organizational operations smoothly due to the lack of staff.

When assigning employees to those training programs, sometimes, favoritism is being practiced. Higher officers tend to give the opportunity to someone who is closer to them. In such a situation, other employees become disappointed.

There is no practical application of using knowledge in the training program and there is less opportunity to get any feedback from the participants about the training programs.

Some training programs have been organized for the purpose of holding merely a training and others repeated the same content continuously. The trainings are rarely organized relevant to the required subject related to the officers.

An opportunity to get a foreign training program is very rare for the DOs who are working in the DSs than DOs who are working in a ministry.

As a result of a lack of proper transfer procedure, Development Officers must work in the same workstation for a long period which also affect negatively their performance.

### ***c) Performance Appraisal***

There is no significant strength of the performance appraisal system related to the DOs.

There is no proper measure of performance, hence there is no specific advantage of the existing performance appraisal system.

It is difficult to measure employees' performances as there are no specific tasks that are assigned to DOs. Hence it is difficult to design a proper indicator to measure the performances of the DOs. At the end of the year, all officers who are hardworking

as well as not working are treated in an equal manner. This situation discourages motivated and hardworking employees.

Most of the DOs are middle-aged and female. They join this service mainly to get government benefits (the government salary and pension) and their performance level is lower than young DOs.

#### ***d) Compensation and Benefits***

With respect to the private sector, government officials who are benefiting as public officers are entitled to have more privileges apart from the salary. Even during a crisis (e.g., the Covid-19 pandemic situation) the public officers received their entire salary even without going to work. Furthermore, a pension scheme for public service officers is highly favorable for the employees.

There is no clear link between performance and compensation given in the public sector. Even though the non-monetary benefits (leaves, job security) in the government sector are high, monetary benefits are relatively lower with respect to the private sector.

DOs are not very concerned about increments as there is no proper promotional scheme. There is no overtime or other incentive package for Dos who are entitled to receive a limited and less amount of compensation package in person when compared to other parallel positions in the government.

### **4.3. Discussion**

There are several key areas in human resource management that will directly affect organizational productivity. Firstly, by attracting and retaining qualified employees, the organization will be impacted by matching staff with the organization's strategic and organizational needs. Also, by providing for the recruitment, growth, and retention of skilled employees who can achieve high performance, efficiency, and a high level of social customer service and who "suit" the organization's culture and strategic needs (Al-Khaled et al., 2020) organizational productivity can be increased. Training and Development refers to the development of the abilities of an individual employee and the organization. But in Sri Lanka, the public sector's priority for training and development programs is much less (Priyantha, 2007). Yet, Wickramasinghe (2015) has identified some other factors that determine the quality and success of public sector training programs, which are not prioritized frequently in the Sri Lankan context. According to that study, achievement of course objectives, appropriateness, and clustering of the groups are determining the success of managerial staff training, while the applicability and knowledge of resource persons

determine the effectiveness of training programs for non-managerial staff. Another reason for this minor attention to the training and development program is the existing promotion system. The procedure that is followed in promotion to senior positions hinders the motivation to acquire such expertized knowledge (Priyantha, 2007).

Reward management will ensure motivation as well as the employees' commitment to their roles, and in return, the organization will reward their staff according to their productivity and how they contribute to the organization as a whole. Furthermore, learning and development also play a crucial role in organizational performance. It enlarges the base of expertise and establishes the levels of skills needed by the workforce (Al-Khaled et al., 2020). Moral incentives, rewards, efficiency of reward systems, and promotions are four factors found to have a significant impact on employee performance. Human resource management is associated with the performance of the organization (Al-Khaled et al., 2020).

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1. Recommendations**

Policy recommendations are suggested for effective human resource management with references to the selected HR practices for enhancing the performance of the public sector in Sri Lanka.

- Recruitment and selection should be implemented according to a proper human resource plan.

Before the recruitment process, a proper human resources plan is required to identify the exact needs of the employee requirements and duties of the organization based on a careful scientific survey. When recruiting these officials, a job analysis is needed to identify their duties and responsibilities. During the interview process, it must be ensured whether DOs have the capacity to perform the assigned task. As the recruitment of DOs is a simple political decision and not a comprehensively analyzed policy decision, the government decides to recruit graduate trainees as Development Officers as a solution to graduate unemployment, without considering the requirements of the country. As a result of that, it creates an unnecessary burden on government expenditure. Also, at the recruitment and selection stage, the minimum qualifications and the age limit should be specified. Furthermore, it should be examined by conducting a study on duties relating to the Development Officers to understand whether it could be managed by employing a lesser number of officers and if there is an excess cadre, the possibility to transfer properly for other suitable duties.

- Specify the job description in alignment with the organizational vision, mission, and objectives.

A job description is a document that clearly states essential job requirements, job duties, job responsibilities, and skills required to perform a specific role. A detailed job description will cover how success is measured and can be used in performance evaluations. However, DOs do not have such a clear job description. As a result of that, it is very difficult to assign DOs for a certain task.

The DOs do not have a specific clear written or formal duty list and they are not responsible for duties like other permanent officers. They help others and learn during the job training. As a result of that the authoritative parties face problems in cases like delegating tasks to Dos. Thus, it is essential to create a specific duty list for DOs as per the goals and objectives of the organization to which the recruited officials are attached. Such a situation makes it easy to direct the DOs to achieve the objectives and improve the performance of that organization. As most of the DOs are appointed in Divisional Secretariats, a specific duty list could be prepared for DOs to direct and coordinate all the development activities. Thus, a specific job description should be prepared for DOs to perform duties to prevent disappointment and dissatisfaction of the officials.

- Awareness programs for Graduate trainees at the early stage of recruitment

The graduates' promotion, transfer system, and overtime facilities are important areas of their employment. These graduates, however, need proper awareness regarding development activities, project proposal writing, and other related duties. Through these awareness programs, these officers can understand their job roles and responsibilities and how those roles and responsibilities relate to the service delivery and various government rules, regulations procedures, and other important information.

- Build up a recognition towards DOs.

Except for the specific service minutes, recruitment procedure, and salary scale, there should be a clear duty list that has to be designed according to the qualifications. Moreover, DOs should be recognized by other officials as DOs are degree holders. Motivational programs are required for DOs to improve their morality should also be held. In that way, a higher contribution from the DOs could be obtained to enhance organizational performance.

- Develop a favorable working environment for DOs.

In some cases, after the recruitment, DOs do not get adequate facilities for doing their duties and they must work under minimum facilities. Thus, very often, DOs are less satisfied. Hence, to improve their satisfaction level, a favorable working environment is essential.

- Organize attitude development programs.

Most of the DOs have attitude problems that negatively affect both individual and organizational performance. Hence there should be an organizational development program to nurture positive attitudes and a working culture for these officials.

- Unemployed graduates should be recruited as Management Services Officers (MSOs)

The minimum qualification level for recruiting Management Services Officers (MSOs) is the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level. The MSOs are recruited based on the merits of the competitive examination. For recruiting DOs, the same procedure could be applicable. Similarly, the required qualifications of the Management Service Officers must be increased by requesting a degree. Then, unemployed graduates could be recruited to the MSO position by reducing the unemployment of graduates in the country.

- Proper training programs should be planned and implemented as per the requirements of the organization.

Before planning training programs, a clear identification of the internal requirements of the organization (qualification, capabilities, and required performance) needs to be assessed. Updated knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes should be embedded into the training programs. Further, subject-wise training modules should be included in the training programs and request can be made to the officials to make it a compulsory training. Also, feedback from the participants should be obtained to ensure the effectiveness of the training. Provision of local and foreign training, and providing scholarships based on their performances are also important. Newly recruited development officers do not have the required knowledge regarding government rules and regulations, office management, etc. Continued training and development programs are essential to improve their work productivity. To have an effective public service, and performance-oriented management, new skills and knowledge in upcoming technologies are a must. Most of the time, when conducting a training program in the public sector, priority should be given to recruiting committed employees.

- There should be a clear mechanism to evaluate performance.

There should be proper supervision of the activities of the DOs who are working in the field. The assigned task should be monitored in a proper manner through progress reports. Having identified the specific targets for the officers, clear and specific performance indicators should be established to measure employee performance. Thus, salary increments and promotions could be granted based on the performance evaluation.

Some initiatives have been taken to introduce a new performance evaluation system in the public sector in the country. Accordingly, the first step was the preparation of job descriptions for each officer. The next step was the preparation of an 'activity basket,' which is the term used for the set of activities related to the respective unit/division of the ministry that the officers are supposed to complete within a given year. Each officer of that unit or division must identify the activities related to them and keep those in a virtual pool of activities. At the end of the year, not only the performance of an individual officer but also the performance of the entire unit/division should be evaluated based on the progress of the completion of activities. After the preparation of the activity basket, the next step was the preparation of the performance agreement. This stage too, was a hectic one that involved several consultations, one-to-one discussions, and workshops (Wickramasinghe, 2015).

- Establish a proper promotion scheme

DOs do not have a proper promotion scheme and the heads of departments face problems in delegating tasks to the DOs the higher officials are unable to organize a formal annual training for them as they do not have a proper promotion scheme. Hence, required measures should be taken to minimize the dissatisfaction of the officers by establishing a proper promotion scheme and assigning specific targets for them. The promotions should be given according to the way they achieve those targets. Also, a clear career path should be initiated for them to be promoted to the Sri Lanka Administrative Service (Grade 11 level) through a suitable promotion scheme.

- Establish a better compensation system

Although most government officers receive benefits, DOs are entitled to less benefits compared to other public servants. As a result, DOs get disappointed and dissatisfied. Hence, a better remuneration system is required for DOs based on their performance.

## **5.2. Conclusion**

The study discussed the existing HRM practices, identified the strengths and weaknesses of these practices, and examined how these HR practices affect the performance of public sector organizations in Sri Lanka. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with all the 13 Divisional Secretaries in the Colombo District and analyzed narratively. The study revealed that the existing HR practices obstruct in achievement of the organizational objectives and also that there is no clear career path for the Development Officers due to the several weaknesses and limited strengths inherited with the recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and compensation systems. Thus, the study concluded that the existing HRM practices in the Sri Lankan



public sector have weakened the performance of the public sector due to the lack of recruitment and selection, lack of training and development, poor performance appraisal, and improper compensation, and benefits. Accordingly, policy measures are recommended to revise the existing HR practices for enhancing both officers and organizational performances of the public sector in Sri Lanka.

## **6. Limitations and Future Research**

This study has several limitations. As this study is based on interviews with the Divisional Secretariats in the Colombo District, the generalizability of the findings is limited due to the study being based on qualitative research methods with a smaller sample. A comprehensive scenario could be revealed if the researchers collect the data from Development officers as well. Future research could also be undertaken with a quantitative approach to validate the findings of this research with a larger sample representing the entire Divisional Secretariats of the country.

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