

Public Administration Circular No.140

My No.543E.586 D.

Establishments Division,  
Ministry of Public Administration  
and Home Affairs,  
Independence Square,  
Colombo 7, 31 May, 1979.

To: All Secretaries to Ministries  
and Heads of Departments.

Implementation of Work Norms in Ministries and  
Government Departments

Government has decided that the report on the establishment of work norms in Government Departments prepared by the Director of Establishments be circulated among all Ministries and Heads of Departments for study of the recommendations for the establishment of norms contained in that report with a view to implementing them in the respective offices.

2. In this connection I wish to draw your attention to the following extract from the letter No.125/40 dated 7th March, 1979 addressed by His Excellency the President to all Secretaries to Ministries on "output of work, punctuality, discipline and ways and means of improving work consciousness amongst employees at all levels".

"In most Government Institutions there is an unequal distribution of work resulting in some officers being over burdened with work, others being left idle most of the time. But, all of them enjoy the same rights, benefits and privileges. This has a demoralising effect on the diligent and honest officer. There is, therefore, an urgent need for norms and targets to be fixed for every employee. Apart from the overall benefits that would accrue to the country, this would enable a fair and equal distribution of work among employees in an Institution and thus provide a motivational element for efficient and hard work."

3. I shall therefore be glad if you would study the recommendations contained in the report for the implementation of work norms, copy of which is sent herewith and send me a report within a month on the progress in regard to implementing the recommendations for the establishment of Work Norms in Government Offices.

Sgd: V.T.Navaratne  
Director of  
Establishments

Sgd: D.B.I.P.S.Siriwardhana  
Secretary,  
Ministry of Public Administration  
and Home Affairs.

## Towards Work Norms in Government Offices in Sri Lanka.

(A Report Prepared by V.T. Navaratne, Director  
of Establishments)

### 1. Introduction

1. Work norms are determined on the basis of work measurement, i.e. the measuring of the work content of a job by means of time. The modern concept of work measurement includes within it the premise that the work to be measured must be clearly defined and the circumstances surrounding it controlled. The British standard definition for work measurement is "the application of techniques designed to establish the time for a qualified worker to carry out a specified job and at a defined level of performance." Job to be measured must first be investigated to ensure that the best possible method of working has been arrived at and this implies the use of method study techniques.

ii. Only a few organisations have applied work measurement extensively to offices although the importance of work measurement for the effective running of an office has been recognised since a long time ago. The effectiveness of any office work will be judged not simply in terms of whether useful results are achieved but whether the quantity produced justifies the cost. Without conventional work measurement it is difficult to estimate the cost of paper work and as labour. Cost can only be calculated from information as to the time consumed on the different phases of paper work. Work measurement data can assist in determining whether the division of work within departments or between departments is the most economical. Division of work in a department can be organised on a horizontal basis, i.e. where a job is broken down into stages and each stage is carried out by different staff; or on a vertical basis, i.e. where the volume of work is divided into homogenous lots and the staff work from each lot from start to finish.

iii. Knowledge of results is a vital factor in motivating individuals. It has been found that where no assessment of office staff is made and where there is no feed back to them of their progress, output tends to be about 70% of what it would be if they were given information on a continuous basis as to how well they were doing and their progress was discussed with them. It should be stressed that this increase in output can be achieved without sacrifice of quality and without financial incentives. However, whenever output standards are established for office work, quality assessments should also be made or otherwise there will always be the possibility that output has been achieved by a lowering of quality.

iv. Without work measurement it is difficult for the management to recognise the conscientious and industrious employee because salary increases and promotions are not geared to an employee's performance on the job. Where the employee's output in quality and quantity have been objectively assessed, the assessment can be used as a basis for salary increases and for purposes of promotions. Financial incentives in the office are not widespread. However a serious objection to financial incentives is that there are generally a few jobs in any office where the work content cannot be measured to a suitable degree, but to leave individuals holding such jobs out of a proposed financial incentive scheme would cause dissatisfaction.

v. Work measurement is at best the least popular of the management sciences, at worst a tactless application will positively reduce productivity. When introducing it, therefore, positive efforts must be made to explain the purpose and practice of work measurement to all concerned.

## 2. How can work output be increased ?

vi In the field of behavioural science, a long accepted classical theory made the following assumptions about human behaviour.

(i) The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can.

(ii) Therefore people must be coerced, controlled, directed and threatened if management is to get them to put forth adequate effort towards the achievement of organisational objectives.

(iii) The average human being prefers to be directed, will avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition and wants security above all.

vii. These assumptions, described as "Theory X" by Douglas Mc. Gregor in his work "The Human Side of Enterprise" have given way to the newer concepts described by him as "Theory Y" which assumes -

(i) The expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest;

(ii) External controls and threats of punishments are not the only means of bringing about effort towards organisational objectives. Man will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which he is committed;

(iii) Commitment to objectives is a function of rewards associated with their achievement;

(iv) The average human being learns under proper conditions not only to accept but to seek responsibility;

(v) The capacity to exercise a high degree of imagination, ingenuity and creativity in the solution of organisational problems is widely not narrowly distributed to the population;

(vi) Under the conditions of modern industrial life the potentialities of the average human being are only partially utilised.

viii. Therefore the basic assumption here is that the average human being would enjoy his work as much as he does play or rest, and his potentialities are being only partially utilised. How then can the worker be made to

enjoy his work and also increase the utilisation of his potentialities? The answer to this is Motivation. The employee must be motivated to enjoy his work, to willingly participate in it, and do it for the sake of achievement.

3. What are the factors which motivate employees to work effectively?

ix. Generally these are a challenging job which allows a feeling of achievement, responsibility, growth, advancement and enjoyment of work itself and earned recognition. High motivation obtains when employees feel that conditions in which they work are sufficiently open to their influence so that if they perform well then they can look forward to certain rewards.

x. Thus the invariable and common denominators for increasing output through work norms are high motivation on the part of the participants, a sense of achievement when the work is done and the expectation of reward, whatever form it may take, for that achievement. Work norms, if they are to be successful, should not be imposed from above, they should be the result of mutual negotiation and willing acceptance on the part of those who have to perform. Work norms introduced from above can be arbitrary and thoroughly unrealistic and would therefore inevitably end in failure.

xi. Therefore if work norms are to contain the vital ingredients of motivation, participation and achievement, the following steps have to be necessarily followed in working them out and implementing them :

Step (1) The individual employee discusses each job with his superior officer and they agree on the content of his job and the relative importance of his major duties which are the things he is paid to do and which he is accountable for.



Step (2) The employee and his superior officer agree on performance targets for each work responsibility for a given period of time. A target is a clearly defined goal to be achieved by a stipulated date.

Step (3) Check points are established for the evaluation of his progress and ways of measuring progress are selected.

Step (4) The employee and his superior meet at the end of an agreed period to discuss the results of the subordinate's efforts to meet the target of work that has been previously established.

4. On the other hand when do employees begin to become dissatisfied?

xii. This normally happens when opportunities for meaningful achievement are eliminated and employees become alienated from their environment and begin to find fault. The dissatisfaction is generally directed against what is described as "maintenance factors" which are factors mostly peripheral to the job such as work rules and conditions or seniority rights, wages, fringe benefits and the like. Improvement in respect of these factors has little motivational value but their fulfilment is essential to avoid dissatisfaction. But if the employees are properly motivated these maintenance factors have relatively little influence either for purposes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

5. The Sri Lanka experience

xiii. Output targets and work norms have been fixed and tried out in Government factories and similar work places. In the case of output targets, an individual worker is expected to produce an 'X' number of units of a particular product during an 8 hour working day. If he falls short of this target he is called upon to answer by his supervisor. In the case of work norms a minimum norm is fixed for a

worker and if the work norm is related to an incentive scheme he is compensated for whatever he has produced above his fixed norm, such compensation being invariably monetary. The output targets and norms had been worked out and fixed on the basis of "time and motion studies", i.e. the time required to execute the motions necessary for the production of a particular unit. However even in factories work norms have not been practised consistently or on an extensive scale.

xiv. In the case of Government Offices, except in isolated instances, work norms have been practically non-existent. In other countries too, both developed and less developed, the practice of work norms in Government Offices have been very limited probably due to the difficulties encountered in determining work norms and getting feed back on performance due to the diversity and variety of the type of work that is done in the offices. However, in certain Government Departments, usually where a specific job of work had to be done expeditiously, certain type of work norms or piece rate work had been adopted but generally this type of work norm or piece rate work ended with the completion of the specific job of work. A resume of this type of work norm or piece rate work tried out in Sri Lanka is given in Annex I.

xv. In the Sri Lanka Railway, the personal files of nearly 26,000 employees were maintained in the District and Divisional Offices on a decentralised basis. When individual employees made appeals to the Ministry of Transport for the redress of grievances and reports on them were called for, several months used to elapse before these were furnished because information had to be obtained from the District/Divisional Offices. It was also found that the personal files in these offices were not being properly maintained and kept up to date. This also had adverse effect on the processing of pension papers and at one time hundreds of pension awards were being held up in consequence. Therefore a decision was taken by the management to centralise the personal files at headquarters and each clerk called a

Cabinet Clerk was given between two to three hundred files, which represented a similar number of employees, to be maintained by him. In each personal file he had to attend to about 24 items of work ranging from history sheets to loans.

xvi. Of these items, although only some were very active, the responsibility of the subject clerk to maintain the two to three hundred files entrusted to him up to date at any given time constituted his work norm. This proved to be quite successful because after the arrears were cleared, information on any individual employee were available to the management 'on tap' and furthermore the processing of pension papers was facilitated so considerably that the Sri Lanka Railways which had been at one time one of the more prominent offenders in the matter of processing pension papers and awarding pension became within a few years exemplary in this respect.

6. Proposals for the introduction of work norms in Government Offices in Sri Lanka.

xvii. Work norms are generally intended here for Clerks of different types such as pay clerks, ledger clerks, book keeping clerks, cabinet clerks and subject clerks. They are also intended for computer clerks, punch card operators and those who operate different types of machines in offices and also for typists. It has to be conceded that the work involved at these levels is more often than not routine and therefore can be monotonous. Therefore a high degree of job satisfaction cannot be expected in their performance. A punch card operator has to punch a certain number of cards. A pay clerk has to prepare a certain number of pay sheets and so on. Therefore motivation has to be achieved by other means such as participation and willing acceptance from the very beginning. In determining work norms it is necessary to ensure acceptance of such norms and their performance within the agreed period of



time by those who have to perform or by keeping all the work entrusted to them which constitute their work norms up to date at any given time.

xviii. As a first step the Management Services Division of the Ministry of Public Administration will, in the light of past experience and after investigations where necessary, set out in broad outline, work norms for each category e.g. a Cabinet Clerk may be expected to be responsible for 250 to 300 personal files, 125 to 150 pay sheets may be laid down for each pay sheet clerk or Punch Card Operator's daily work norm would perhaps be set out as 2,000 cards per day and so on.

xix. The work norm should thereafter be worked out after discussion between the individual clerk and his staff officer and should not be too low or too high so as to be unrealistic. For example on the basis of past experience a cabinet clerk working during office hours each day and over a period of 20 days a month would be expected to maintain 300 personal files representing a similar number of employees and ensure that these files are in all respects up to date. Then that should be considered as constituting that particular cabinet clerk's work norm. This same general principle can be applied in working out the work norms in respect of officers engaged in all other types of work in Government offices. A typist may be expected to have a minimum speed of say 40 words per minute and on that basis type out a certain number of pages each day (also discounting for rest and other time allowances). That becomes his work norm for the day and is multiplied into the number of working days for the month. Similarly, actual tests would have revealed that a punch card operator could punch a certain number of cards during the minimum number of hours he is expected to work each day. That becomes his work norm. This principle can be applied in generality to all government offices in determining work norms for every

individual officer. As important as determining work norms is the requirement to ensure that the work norms are being achieved. Such supervision is not meant and should not be by any means considered as a fault finding exercise. It is really a re-establishment of the dialogue between the officer and his staff officer which started when they met and agreed on the work norm. Any other approach will breed suspicion on both sides which will ultimately defeat objectives for which work norms were set. This dialogue must take place at the beginning of each month, during its first week, in respect of the individual officer's performance of his work norm during the previous month.

7. How can this rapport be maintained while at the same time supervision is also ensured?

xx. Two simple checks are suggested for this purpose. One is by the officer himself. He maintains in a form, prescribed for the purpose (annex 11) a record of the number of letters he receives daily and also the number of letters he had disposed of at the end of the day. At the end of each month he makes a tally of the letters he received and disposed of along with any carry overs from the previous month. In a remarks column maintained for this purpose he will explain the reasons for any delays. He will sign and hand it over to his staff officer, who will after discussions with the officer concerned make his own remarks regarding acceptance or non acceptance of explanation.

xxi. The other check will be the responsibility of the staff officer. The staff officer will maintain with him a list of the files that are in charge of a particular clerk. During the first week of each month he will undertake a random sampling of these files and at random call for 5 to 10 per cent of the files in the subject clerk's charge, scrutinize them and satisfy himself that the work in the file has been maintained up to date. In a form prescribed for the purpose (Annex 111) in which will be entered the name of the officer, the nature of his

duties and post, class and grade, he will enter particulars of the files he has inspected during the random sampling and against each file he will note whether it has been maintained up to date or not. Thereafter he will send for the subject clerk and inform him that his work is up to date or if there have been arrears he will find out the reasons and enter them in a remarks column maintained for the purpose along with any comments he wishes to make. He will thereafter sign the form and file it. The staff officer will refer to these forms filed of record during the previous 12 months in deciding on the annual increment of the officer and for the purpose of assessment for confidential and special reports required for promotional purposes.

xxii. In the case of Typists each officer will keep in the form referred to earlier a daily record of the number of letters or drafts he received for typing and at the end of each day will also record the number of pages he has typed. That will serve as the assessment of his work norm.

xxiii. In the case of punch card operators and others who have manipulative functions they will keep a record of the number of cards they have punched or the number of items they have attended to each day which will be matched against the work norms that have been set for them. As has been stated earlier, without work measurement it is very difficult for the management to recognise a conscientious and industrious employee so that salary increases do not tend to be geared to the clerk's performance of the job. The proposals outlined here will make work measurement and work norms meaningful by gearing them to rewards in the form of salary increases and promotions. It should also motivate participating officers and give them a sense of achievement.

xxiv. Work norms cannot be worked out and implemented in Government offices with the exact precision that is possible in factories and similar work places where production potential can be determined to the minutest detail, through time and motion studies. Therefore a much simpler system has to be devised for government offices which should at least ensure continuously a reasonable output of work by each and every officer. It is for this purpose that a very simplified system, easy of implementation outlined above has been proposed. The forms proposed to be used (Annexes 11 and 111) should be improved upon and perfected by the Management Services Division.

xxv. Finally it must be mentioned that if work norms in Government Offices are to be successful, one of the requirements is motivation at the managerial level, particularly in the Sri Lanka Administrative Service which continues to form the main framework of the Administration. However, over the years haphazard transfers, the placement of junior officers in senior positions, the down grading of senior officers in junior positions etc. have cumulatively contributed to a gradual erosion of motivation within this service. This has resulted in many quarters in 'aimless drifting' and 'marking time'. Such trends should be recognised and arrested without delay and replaced by a high achievement motivation which is not only necessary but is also possible at these managerial levels.

#### Summary of recommendations

1. The introduction of work norms in the Government Offices at the level of clerical and allied grades is feasible and can be implemented to ensure a reasonable output of work continuously.



2. As a first step the Management Services Division of the Ministry of Public Administration will set out in broad outline work norms for each type of work.
3. The work norm for each officer should be determined by consultation between him and his staff officer and should generally be accepted by both.
4. Work norms should be realistic and should not be fixed too low or too high.
5. Once the work norm is determined and accepted it will be the responsibility of the officer to complete such norm during the particular month.
6. For the purpose of serving as a check on progress by the officer himself he will, in the form prescribed for the purpose, enter daily the number of letters he receives and the number he disposes of at the end of each day.
7. Once this form is completed at the end of each month he will hand it over to his staff officer with any remarks he may make regarding shortfalls.
8. The staff officer will have with him a list of files maintained by each clerk and during the first week of each month he will do a random sampling of the work done during the previous month by inspecting between 5 to 10 per cent of the files for which the officer is responsible.
- 9.1 After entering the results of the inspection in the form he will discuss with the officer his achievement or shortfall.
10. In the case of typists, each officer will keep in the form referred to earlier a daily record of the number of letters he receives and of the number of pages he types for the day. In the case of punch card operators and others who have manipulative functions they will keep a record of the number of cards they have punched or the number of items they have attended to each day.

11. These forms, filed of record during the previous 12 months will be examined by the staff officer when he has to approve the officer's increment and also for the purpose of assessment for confidential and special reports for promotional purposes.

12. In order to motivate officers to work far above the work norms set for them and also to give them a sense of achievement the question of granting special increments should be considered. This should however be only for exceptional work.

Acknowledgements

Theory 'X' and Theory 'Y' by Douglas Mc Gregor in the 'Human Side of Enterprise'. Motivation analysis by Frederick Herzberg Achievement Motive by David C. Mc Lelland. (Harvard Business Review). Cranfield Institute of Management, U.K. Management Services Division, Ministry of Public Administration. Asian Center for Development Administration, Kuala Lumpur.

To be maintained by the Officer.  
Do not include letters for which  
replies are not due

1st SHEET

Month: ..... Year: .....

Name: ..... Class/Grade: .....

Division/Branch: ..... Name of S.O.: .....

Description of duties:

DATE	LETTERS OR CASES		DESPATCHED
	Received	Submitted	
(Please note reference briefly)			

Remarks by  
Officer:

Signature

Date

Remarks

Initials of  
Staff Officer

Date

STAFF INSPECTION & APPRAISAL REPORT FOR  
JANUARY 1978

WORK NORM FORM II

Month ..... Year .....

Name ..... Class or Grade

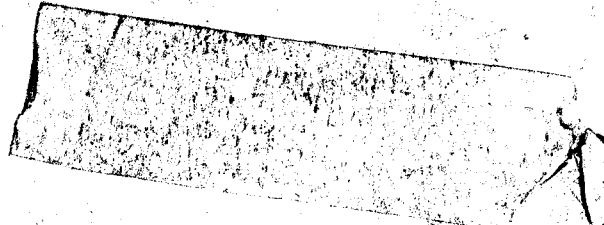
Position .....

Description of work

Work Norm/load  
(or no. of files)

No. of files inspected  
and their file numbers

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



REMARKS OF THE STAFF OFFICER AFTER DISCUSSION WITH THE OFFICER

Signature of Staff officer

Date:



No. Department/Office	Category/Subject	Particulars of Work Item
1. Inland Revenue Department	Pay Clerks	Various items of work connected with the payment of salaries of 250 to 275 persons per pay clerk per month.
2. Sri Lanka Type Corporation	-do-	Same particulars. 500 to 550 persons
3. Postal and Telecommunication (Telephone billing section)	Lodger Clerks	750 lodger accounts per clerk in case of those handling group accounts (i.e. involving schedules, building the amount for each telephone re offices etc.) 725 lodger accounts per clerk in respect of "L.A., L.O. and L.S." sections. 2250 lodger accounts per clerk in respect of the "T.F." section (overseas telephone billing and only posting is done).
4. -do-	Cheque Clerks	140 cheques (received in settlement of bills) to be debit by each clerk.
5. Labour Tribunals	General Clerical work.	2 clerks up to a receipt of 150 L.T. applications, 3 clerks for over 150 per month, and 4 clerks for a Tribunal with 2 Presidencies.
6. -do-	Typists	1 typist for each Tribunal with 30 or more L.T. applications a month.
7. -do-	Office employees	1 KKS and 1 Office Labourer for each L.T. at Vaunganil Street. 2 KKS and 1 O.L. for each other L.T.
8. Marketing (Review of the Establishments Branch)	Establishments Clerks	To attend to the following numbers of personal files and other work as indicated against each individual clerk.
	Clerk No. 1	323 files
	Clerk No. 2	545 files
	Clerk No. 5	Leave
	Clerk No. 4	Railway Warrants and Season Tickets
	Clerk No. 5	Pension applications, History Sheets of those over 50 years etc. via Director of Pensions Circular No. 1
	Clerk No. 8	

No. Department/Office . Category/Subject Particulars of Work Norm

Clerk No. 7	566 files
Clerk No. 8	551 files
Clerk No. 9	570 files
Clerk No. 10	270 files - casual labour
Clerk No. 11	157 files
	Refund of Security ) Assistance to
	Remittances of Returns ) Security Clerk
Clerk No. 12	Security Clerk

9. Courts

Typists	5 pages per hour
English	2 pages per hour
Sinhala	

(each page containing 360 words in either language)