

A Perspective of Work Organisation in Government Administration

On the basis of the emerging concepts in the study of organisation (Bennis, 1966; Dayal, 1971) we will examine here a rationale for organisation of the task of the government. There are two important reasons for such an examination: (a) The nature of the government's task has become very much more complex, thus requiring a review of the existing design and its rationale and (b) the committees appointed to study the government's administrative systems seldom account for the underlying shifts in the government's task, thus overlooking data that are necessary for evolving a system that is basically consistent with the new kinds of government activities. Most of the recommendations aim, primarily, at improving the existing procedures of work. Even the Administrative Reforms Commission has failed to examine the shifts in some of government's basic tasks and their impact on the organisational design of the administrative system.

My purpose is briefly to discuss the principal findings of research in organisational theory and to suggest an approach for a possible design of the government's administrative system based on the analysis of work. An added significance of this exercise is the need to evolve an appropriate organisation, and an administrative system, that can effectively respond to the government's objectives of a mixed economy, social controls, direction of the pattern of growth of small and large industry and agriculture, and the coordinated growth of social, economic and cultural aspects of the Indian society.

The Requirements of the Administrative System

The design of an administrative system is a basic aid to the achievement of its primary objectives; if the design is unsound, the achievement of objectives

is likely to fall short of expectations. Thus the two components of the administrative structure are (a) design that is capable of achieving the basic purposes; (b) an evaluating instrument built into the design in order to evaluate this achievement. The primary task of the administrative structure has three aspects to it.

The structure must be appropriate for the nature of the work. There is impressive data to suggest that different types of work systems (or technology) require different administrative and organisational structures.

The Imperial College & Tavistock Institute studies in London, and subsequently others, show that different types of technology require different organisational patterns. Trist and Bemforth (1951) found that changes in the technology in mining required a pattern very different from the earlier work systems.

Woodward's studies of over 100 firms in UK showed marked differences in the administrative systems in batch, process and mass producing industries (Woodward, 1965). In a study of electronic industry in the UK Burns and Stalker (1961) pointed out significant differences in system design between innovative and mechanical systems of work.

My own experience in India also supports the findings of the studies mentioned here. The levels of hierarchy, the need for delegation and control differ significantly in a textile plant as compared to technology-based industry such as airlines or electronics. In my reorganisation of a bank, market oriented departments have been organised to enable the manager to establish close links with the markets he serves, while tasks involving credit appraisals of large advances have audit rather than market orientation.

The central concept, amply supported by research (Blauner, 1964; Walker, 1962; Whyte, 1959; Dayal, 1970), is that the organisational design varies according to activities. If the design overlooks this significance it becomes inappropriate in so far as the people working in it are hampered in achieving optimum results. From this perspective the developmental tasks of the government may require a design that is different from the one needed for other tasks. Later, I have examined these different tasks.

The objectives of the sub-units must relate to the objectives of the whole. The evaluation and feedback cycle of performance must be consistent with the nature of work. Conversely if the objectives of the organisation are poorly defined and the controls for performance are inappropriate for the task, people would often set low goals of achievement. In this event the systems of work and of social relationships would be incongruous (Miller and Rice, 1968).

The systems of authority, power and administrative leadership should be consistent with the nature of work, and not independent of it. There are no universal practices suited to all organisations.

These concepts are reinforced by several independent studies in many countries. In India, too, some studies have supported them (Rice, 1958; Dayal & Sharma, 1971). I have selectively discussed these concepts because they have relevance to my discussion later.

Analysis of the Tasks of the Government

The government's administrative organisation is required to perform primarily two tasks:

- (a) Administrative support for formulating the policies of the government.
- (b) Administering the policies so as to achieve the objectives set out by the policy makers, and to carry out the business of the government.

In public administration there has been a running debate on the question whether the 'advisory role' in policy formulation and the 'executive role' should be combined or should the two remain separated. The Gujarat government, as indeed others, have held symposia, working papers by IAS officers and other interested people on this question.

In some ministries the policy formulation and executive functions are combined and in some others the two are kept separate. In some cases, new positions such as development commissioner or famine commissioner, etc, have been created which cut across the boundaries of several departments. The decisions to create or to combine functions are often based on the exigencies of the situation, and rarely on a sound theoretical base, or as a result of systematic study.

There are many important questions in this area that need empirical study, and for developing theories of organisation in public administration. Some relevant questions are: what are the demands of the policy role— what data is needed, what are the sources of this data, what familiarity with field operations is needed to develop an effective policy, what skills are needed for collation, interpretation and diagnosis of the existing situation to avoid ivory tower policies, etc? What kind of organisational support is needed to perform this role effectively? What feedback system is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy? What control systems are necessary to insure effective action?

Having raised some of the questions in this aspect of the administrative function, I shall deal with only the second question, *viz.*, the aspect of

administering the policies. By further analysing the tasks, I shall examine a possible rationale for the organisation of the executive tasks of the government.

The Executive Tasks

The executive tasks of the Government broadly cover three identifiable areas of activities:

- Relating to divisional or district administration: revenue collection, maintenance of law and order, supervision of public health measures, maintenance of services such as roads, buildings, traffic etc. I will call these tasks as the traditional tasks of the government.
- Relating primarily to growth of economic, social and-cultural life of the Indian society and the people. I will call these development tasks.
- Supervision and control of the productive units to provide goods and services. These tasks require management of enterprises or organisations such as posts and telegraph services, state transport, research institutions, industrial enterprises In the public sector, etc. I will label these as the task of managing public enterprises.

The characteristics of each of these tasks are the following:

Developmental tasks	Traditional tasks	Task of managing public enterprises
1. Integration of many tasks or departments at decision-points 2. A perspective of the past but also a concern for sustained growth 3. Control and review of achievements at periodic intervals 4. A concern for inter-dependence in relationships at the decision and control centres; interdependence is critical for effective task performance 5. Speed in decision making for integrated and enduring development	1. Each activity is discrete and generally self-contained 2. Use primarily, available data 3. Automatic controls available for the work done 4. Hierarchical authority is adequate for the work system 5. Speed controlled by the procedures of work	1. Performing entrepreneurial role relating to: (a) Plant location and the product mix (b) Targets of achievement and the budgets (c) Approval of long range plans for growth and profitability (d) Managerial controls in relation to (b) & (c) above (e) Appointment of chief executive and the Board (f) Capital sanctions appropriate to the role (g) Evaluation of the Work of the chief executive

Generally, development decisions require integration of data from a variety of sources and interpretation of the whole. Secondly, the development task is better performed if the variables in the situation are within the command of the decision maker.

For example, a general manager has to have the use of varied resources, and explicit authority over his people, and the skill or personal competence for the job for delivering the goods. If functional specialists in the head office of the company continue to exercise independent pressures on the men in the general manager's command, the normal as well as development work are likely to suffer. Within the framework of the company's policies, and the allocations of resources, the general manager should be free to make operating and growth decisions: the two cannot be separated. The higher management need to exercise controls in terms of results and obtain data relating to the key indicators in the given situation.

What applies to the general manager in his work role applies equally to projects of industrial, social and economic development in the field of industry, health, education, agriculture, etc. These being the requirements of the development work, the organisation of developmental activity should satisfy these conditions.

To recapitulate the necessary requirements of the organisation for development activities, the following characteristics appear necessary

- The decision making should rest as close as possible to the point at which activity takes place.
- The administrator should have the command over varied sources of data and also have command of those who provide specialist knowledge relevant to the situation.
- By implication the distance between the administrator at the point of action and the top policy makers should be as little as possible and the levels of hierarchy should also be as few as possible in the given situation.
- To judge the performance, a relevant control and information system is necessary.
- The administrator must have skills in using specialists and in developing team work at the point of activity. Without this kind of leadership an integrative decision making, so vital to development tasks, is unlikely to come about.

From the analysis of the requirements of development activity, the bureaucratic systems based on functional specialisation, depersonalisation

in relationships and hierarchical controls may be dysfunctional to the nature of the development work.

As contrasted with development tasks, the traditional tasks in government administration make different demands on the administrative design. The maintenance of law and order, collection of revenue, taxation, health and other services are discrete tasks and the bureaucratic controls exercised through the hierarchy, functional specialisation, depersonalised patterns of relationships, appeal systems and the reliance on precedence and rules may be most suited to effective performance of these tasks. The enhanced effectiveness in performing the traditional tasks would depend upon reorientation of systems and procedures and training of the staff rather than on a reorientation in organisation of work.

The third task of the government relating to the entrepreneurial role *vis-a-vis* management of public enterprises requires explicit definition of control and operating responsibility. I have discussed this role elsewhere (Dayal, 1969) and I would merely mention here that administrative controls, to be effective, should clearly identify what aspects of the enterprise activity can be controlled at the ministry level and what aspects provide spurious controls. Generally, the entrepreneur can effectively control performance, rather than people; he can control growth and profitability and not individual elements of production; he can supervise growth through short and long range planning and a system of feedback of data concerning key variables in the enterprise situation. In this area the entrepreneur's chief concern is to provide controls that motivate enterprise management rather than inhibit them from decision making, or prevent them from developing unambiguous feeling of responsibility for the goals set for them.

Bureaucratic or indeed any other known system of organisation in itself is neither good nor bad: rather it is suitable or unsuitable for the expected results to be achieved. In spite of growing knowledge about dysfunctionality of bureaucratic system no easy alternatives are available. In performance of traditional tasks in public administration the importance of precedence, of rules of conduct and of stability in administrative behaviour, are significant factors; and these are the strengths of a bureaucracy. In pointing out the dysfunctionality of the system, however correctly, any government decision-maker cannot throw away the baby with the bath water. The dysfunctionality can be minimised, and effort to increase such procedure and rules as lead to efficiency need special study and corrective action. And this task is, by and large, performed by the Administrative Reforms Commission. But this is only a partial task for future effectiveness of the administration of the government.

For organisational effectiveness the relevant question is – what is the most appropriate organisational structure for the given task. My analysis suggests that the answer to this question needs different perspectives than those generally available in reports on public administration. Improvement in the systems for traditional tasks and reorientation in the organisation of development and entrepreneurial tasks may be necessary. The future study and experimentation for toning up government administration would have to differentiate between the nature of the tasks and not merely debate on merits and demerits of the bureaucratic system.

In recent years there have also been serious arguments about changing the attitudes of public administrators. I believe that no amount of training, though it may be good in itself, would effectively change the attitudes of people unless appropriate systems of organisation are developed. Training is meaningful, and it is likely to be effective if changes in the administrative systems are initiated simultaneously. I have discussed these issues more fully elsewhere (Dayal, 1970).

As stated earlier in this chapter, I am not suggesting definitive answers for the problems of public administration. Rather I am suggesting that certain perspectives are needed to study the task systems in public administration. The answers to the present problems and issues may lie not entirely in training, but in systematic studies and action in the field of reorganisation of government administration.

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