

## A Strategy of Reforms in Administration

This paper shares the general belief that public administration has been ineffective in meeting the requirements of the tasks that governments have taken up in the developing countries and that reforms have met with unimpressive results. From this belief the chapter examines the validity of the concepts underlying the strategy of reforms in administration and, keeping in view the characteristics of the governmental tasks, explores an alternative approach to reforms based on the experiences of change in large organisations.

Administrative reforms follow a pattern in most developing countries. A commission of experienced administrators, public men and people of eminence is appointed to study administration or some aspects of it. The commission invariably sets up several study teams in important areas of administration, hold sittings and prepares a report to outline what changes in the structure and systems of working should be made by government.

Generalising from the reports of some of the major administrative reforms commissions, the underlying assumptions appear to be:

The Administration will be efficient:

- (a) if the structure of work is rationally established and rules of business are laid down with deliberate care;
- (b) job descriptions are prepared and given to employees to clarify what they have to do; and
- (c) systematic training is provided to individuals to upgrade their skills.

Some reports also prescribe the need for specialisation on the part of civil servants to handle economic, technological and other bureaus.

Based on these assumptions, the reports lay down how the various bureaus should be arranged or grouped in logical or convenient ways, define

the items of work for each position, including their relations with other bureaus and prescribes training for improving the skills of the civil servants. They prescribes career progression and areas of specialisation for certain areas of work in public administration.

While there is no universal agreement on the strategy of change in large business organisations, most successful programmes follow a wholistic or systems approach. The programmes simultaneously deal with several aspects of working, evolving a rational structure of work, redistribution of authority and power and developing appropriate patterns of relationships in the organisation. Change must concern both the technical and the human processes in the organisation and enhance the quality of decision making at operating and policy levels. The programme of change must be multidimensional, the most important among these are the following:

- (a) Key persons in the organisation should accept the problem areas and the nature of problem and how they have come to be what they are—the processes that have contributed to their dynamics. These persons should be involved in the process of diagnosis and the remedial action.
- (b) The change must require the analysis of the technical system and the human organisation, and identify the characteristics of the new patterns that their task system now requires.
- (c) The people concerned should take on the responsibility for taking appropriate actions for improving the existing situation.

Incorporating these characteristics of change, several strategies are used, all of which are based on continuing involvement of the key people in the diagnosis and the action programme for improving the management system. The assumptions underlying the programmes may be summarised thus:

- (a) Technical and social systems are mutually dependent and a programme of change must take up both together.\*
- (b) Goals and expectations from bureaus and individuals should be explicit and shared by all. Probability of these being shared is greater if key individuals in the system were involved in developing them.
- (c) Change must take place in the minds of men and their involvement in the diagnosis, analysis and resolving organisational problems facilitates this process.

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\* Technical in this context refers to the particular nature of work, rural development, production system, specific market situations, etc.

The strategies of change in large organisations are generally derived from the assumptions of a wholistic approach. Change in the social system and the structure of work must constitute a part of an entire programme of change and must be simultaneous. The strategy for organisational change must involve the key people in diagnosing their problems and taking corrective measures so that they assume responsibility for results. How valid are these assumptions for a programme of reform in government? Is the main focus on modification of structure, job assignment and training, etc. in public administration reforms a limitation for their being effective? How could the experience of change in large organisations be conceptualised to develop a strategy for reforms in government?

Before the questions raised above can be examined, the characteristics of public administration that are different from business and industry should be considered. The examination should suggest how well do the considerations of the latter apply to public administration.

## **The Tasks of the Government**

By its very nature public administration is an open system, it derives its sanctions to act from legitimate bodies outside their own boundaries, and is dependent upon the directions of a political party in power. The implications of the particular characteristics of public administration are that, generally,

- (a) Deviations in rules can only be allowed at higher levels of administrative hierarchy so that the individual or groups do not have the feeling of discrimination. The interpretation of rules is therefore more rigid and a hierarchy is needed in functions which have direct contact with the public.
- (b) Policy formulation is separated from the executive. The policy decision may often require compromises resulting in two types of consequences (i) the factors of cost and efficiency may receive less consideration than the need to reach a decision often by consent and agreement or compromises; and (ii) the policy may often solve one problem at the cost of other problems – segmental rather than systems perspective prevails the decision making situations.
- (c) The administration has functional control, each ministry being responsible for the subject assigned to it. Coordination in important matters is achieved through committees. Hence, integrating centres within the administration do not generally exist in the organisational design (Lawrance & Lorsch, 1969; Dayal, 1975).

These characteristics of public administration generally apply to large organisations as well. The location of decision making, the separation of operating and directional functions and the functional controls are commonly observed in most large organisations (Dayal et, al., 1981). Business organisations are, however, not as open to public influence as government. Administrator, are not governed by the mandate of an elected political party. The internal managerial problems of large organisations apply with equal force to public administration. They have to be concerned with improvement in the decision making apparatus as with the operating problems of organisation and administration for achieving results at reasonable cost.

The implications of the task system of government administration are: (a) the decision making apparatus must be open to influences by political considerations, and subject to approval by the Parliament; (b) the administration is open to public influence and this circumstance influences its working. It is nonetheless concerned with the central issues relating to organisational and administrative practices that would help it to achieve the best possible results. More effective the administration the less the adverse impact of forces that are external to the system.

Three separate but related areas for conceptualising reforms in administration, are:

- (a) The framing of the public policy and its political orientation.
- (b) The administrative machinery—an approach to dealing with the open system influences.
- (c) Suitability of a strategy of reforms derived from similar programmes in large organisations.

### **The Framing of the Public Policy**

The direction of public policy must have political orientation. It's basis is the commitment that the ruling party makes to the electorate. Hence, political leadership must exercise decisive influence on the policy making in administration.\* Having said this, public policy has to be concerned with effectiveness in two ways: (i) apart from functional or sectoral considerations the policy must overview inter-sectoral linkages. Agriculture policy must supplement, say, small scale industry or rural administration policy, cooperatives, rural development, rural employment and others. At present, examples of one aspect contradicting other aspects are many, even within the same ministry. One wing of the ministry, for example, announces

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\* The head of state of a non-elected government must also influence policy making.

measures to attract foreign exchange, or tourism, the other wing of the same ministry issues instructions to banks to discourage remittances, or tourist facilities. Such examples of these kinds make a long list.

Among ministries the contradictions in their policy and instructions defeat the purpose for which they are issued. The policy on small scale industry contradicts large industry and both contradict the policy on rural industrialisation and development. All these may contradict the choice of technology. Examples of these are in review reports carried out by the Planning Commission and the reports of the Public Accounts Committee submitted to the Parliament.

The policy formulating system has to develop organisational devices for integrating policies and instructions to operating units. The most common device used to several countries to facilitate integration is the 'policy clusters'. Fulton Committee in the UK had recommended creation of Policy Research and Planning Groups consisting of civil service personnel and specialists drawn from outside the government. Prime Minister Trudou in Canada and presidential staff in the USA have tried variants of policy clusters. These groups or clusters are concerned with a preview of the policy to judge how well it would serve its stated purposes, its relatedness with other policies, the organisational or the operating arrangements needed to achieve results and other relevant aspects of the policy. Policy planning also requires anticipating areas where policy in government is needed. These clusters are set up in important ministries and at inter-ministry levels. The members of the cluster are drawn from many sources—academics and practitioners—so that each is able to contribute towards improving the quality of decision making.

### **The Administrative Machinery**

The civil services have four identifiable roles in government: (a) advising ministers on policy; (b) administering routine tasks such as tax collecting, where rules and precedents are established; (c) promotional or controlling tasks for economic and social development such as licensing, food distribution; and (d) managing enterprises and programmes such as public services institutions, enterprises, autonomous bodies, etc.

Most reform bodies have suggested many areas of reforms in administration to improve government's capability to handle these roles. Fulton Committee in the U.K. had recommended an integrated grading system, changes in recruitment and training of civil servants, programme planning and budgeting, effective controls, and organising autonomous units

that could be accountable to ministries. The Committee had suggested that the work of units should be measured in quantitative terms where possible. The Administrative Reforms Commission in India and Udoji Commission in Nigeria had also made similar recommendations.

Most reform bodies have recommended that differentiated task units should be hived off and set up as independent administrative units with defined responsibility for results. The government in Sweden has set up central departments to deal with policy and hived off operational management to autonomous agencies.

The work organisation should ensure that benefits of the policy reach the target population expeditiously and at the lowest possible cost. The role of the executive system and its management style should match the particular task (Rice 1958; Trist, 1963, Dayal, 1978). They have to be concerned with devising an administrative system that suits the particular task the best. Management practices must be consistent with the nature of the task and should differ from one sort of task system to another. An office set up for issue of passports or ration cards may have to be different from that which is set up to give industrial licences or to direct research and educational systems. In the first case the administration has to cope with large numbers with an arrangement to physically verify the household data. In the second case, experience and technical knowledge to assess the impact on economic development, horizontal and vertical linkages of the product, choice of technology, etc., are needed. The rationing office can function best as a task force; the licensing office may work best as a flat non hierarchical organisation with strong technical and specialist field support. The variations must be reflected both in how it is structured and in its administrative practices.

The tasks of government being varied, different departments require organisation and administrative practices suited to each. Different task systems may have to flexibly develop systems that are most suited to them. There is, therefore, need to differentiate between the policy making and the executive functions. Within the executive tasks, a greater degree of autonomy and flexible systems of administration may be needed depending upon the nature of work. The exercise of designing work systems consists of analysing in each bureau the nature of work, its unique features for structuring roles and role relationships and controls that are needed to ensure planned results. (Woodward, 1965; Brown, 1971; Dayal, 1978).

Conceptually, separation between the policy formulation and executive functions of the government appear necessary for two considerations: (a) the policy must be influenced decisively by the political choice of the

party in power; (b) the administration must be guided to the extent possible, by technical considerations of efficiency and effectiveness. The executive task systems must be able to develop management that suit the particular situation, and not be subject to a rigid pattern just because a bureau is a part of a large organisation. Different tasks would have a greater probability of developing suitable systems if they are separated from the ministry.

Briefly, the task system of the government shows that differentiation at the policy formulation and executive systems may be necessary, and units in the latter should be hived off where appropriate. Each unit would have to develop organisation and administrative practices that suit its task system best.

The roles of the operating units and the Ministry should be different and each should be clearly defined. Failure to establish discrete roles of the ministry and the executing offices often leads to (i) centralisation of work; (ii) increased costs of administration; and (iii) delays and inefficiency in the conduct of work. This lack in administration contributes significantly to uncontrolled growth of the ministry and consequent shift of decision making from operating offices where they belong to the ministry (Dayal, 1978).

### **Strategy of Reforms**

Three significant developments in organisational researches have contributed towards the thinking about a strategy for change in organisations.

- (a) Research and systematic evaluation of experiences have provided a body of knowledge to help design work organisations better. The concepts in organisational studies show the interdependence between structure and behaviour of people and the need to view them together in designing work organisations. It is possible to predict the responses of people to ill suited structures of work and to predicting and diagnosing events. The designing of work systems has moved a step beyond common sense, or experience alone, to knowledge. The emerging knowledge of structure and processes in organisations and behaviour of people need to be applied in designing and developing new systems. Hence, a strategy for administrative reforms must be such that the people concerned have access to knowledge, have the skills to obtain primary data and to analyse this data to diagnose organisational issues and devise a course of action to solve them. The process of analysis and design are beyond the realm of experience alone; they must rest on concepts and theory.

- (b) The concept of man has been influenced by research findings in social sciences. A commonly accepted concept emphasises that the individual's behaviour is directed from within—by his own personality predispositions—but he is influenced significantly by his continuing experiences and the interactions in his environment. Learning from a given situation depends upon the individual himself and therefore the organisation needs to act in several ways to induce the desired patterns of behaviour. Among the significant determinants are the patterns of interaction at work, the styles of leadership and the design of work itself. Change in behaviour or attitudes among employees would require change in the designing of his work, in the patterns of interaction with subordinates and superiors and the styles of leadership. Organisational change must therefore be a result of changes in how the key persons in organisations effect behavioural changes; conversely, changes in structure alone without changes in behaviour would fail to achieve desired changes in attitudes and behaviour of people in organisations.
- (c) Since change must begin in the minds of men, the people concerned must be involved in the process of diagnosing, analysing and determining what needs to be changed. The change in leader behaviour is a primary condition for change at operating levels. Hence a strategy of change requires active involvement of key people in the organisation.

These considerations, and others, have influenced the approaches to change in large organisations. The knowledge derived from organisational studies is relevant to public administration as well. Since reforms in Administration in the past have been less than effective, we may look for suggestions in the experience and research findings of change in large organisations.

The characteristic of a strategy to bring about reforms in administration should cover:

- (a) Acceptance by the key people that the organisation has problems which need solutions.
- (b) Involvement on the part of the key people in the diagnosing and analysing of the problems and understanding the role that the leaders must play in achieving the change.
- (c) Access to technical knowledge and theory in the analysis, diagnosis and planning remedial measures through consulting or other channels.
- (d) Understanding on the part of the personnel of new roles and role relationships in the new system through training and other kinds of behavioural interventions.

## Getting Started

Assuming that the strategies employed for administrative reforms have been ineffective, including those of the Fulton Committee that had received praise for its bold and revolutionary recommendations, and that strategies of change in large organisations offer models for a strategy of reforms in government administration, how should a programme be initiated? Garrett (1980) has appropriately emphasised that "... Such a programme needs political commitment at the highest level and the recognition of the importance of an effective civil service in dealing with the risks and opportunities we face as a nation".

No programme of change is likely to succeed unless the key members of the organisation believe that they have been ineffective in their efforts to achieve desired results and feel the need to appraise their strengths and weaknesses. In this appraisal, the key members would have to believe that improvement in their own performance is needed for effectiveness of the system. The political leadership shall have to accept this appraisal with the unequivocal conviction that a programme to reform administration is essential for achieving the national plans.

The government would have to set up management units in each of the ministries to work closely with the specialist group on structural and behavioural problems of the ministry. These specialist units would have to operate at three levels; liaison with the prime minister's Office and the cabinet, the committee of secretaries and the ministry. Decisions at various stages of the programme would have to be taken at the Cabinet, the inter-ministry and ministry levels.

An approach to reforms in administration suggested here should begin in two or three key ministries. Based on this experience the programme should be extended to other ministries.

## The Rationale

Like the poor, large organisations will always be with us. Large organisations need systems of management that are different from those of the small (Dayal et al. 1981). Large organisations have to consciously hive off sub-systems that are likely to function well as separate entities and develop systems that suit their own task requirements.

By its very purpose, public administration is open to direct influence by the political system and the public through electorate or pressure groups. I

believe this is necessary. These influences have to be channelised in ways that improve decision making and processes in administration. The tasks of the government have to be consciously arranged in a way that some aspects have to be concerned more by political considerations and others by considerations of efficiency and cost. Hence separating the boundary of the policy formulation apparatus from the executive may be necessary. While the first is influenced direct by the political commitment of the party in power, the latter is governed, to the extent possible, by considerations of efficiency. Both, policy formulation and executive systems, however, have to establish a measurable criteria of effectiveness.

In many developing countries the governments have had to assume responsibility for total development-economic and social. Public administration has to play promotional, restraining and managerial roles besides the traditional roles in respect to assisting the minister to formulate policy and administering the routine tasks that are governed primarily by rules and precedence. From all accounts, public administration has not been able to prepare itself sufficiently well for the promotional and the managing roles. The reforms undertaken for this purpose have also been ineffective (Maheshwari, 1981).

The alternative to reforms in governments in the developing countries is to follow the precepts of 'minimum government' so strongly advocated in recent history by president Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher. It is doubtful that their advocacy has relevance for their respective environments, much less for developing countries. The need for equitable distribution of benefits of development and improving living standards of the masses in these countries would continue to demand an active role by the administration. And to improve the results of government policies and administration would remain a necessary condition for growth and development. In this context, need for rethinking on the basic approach to reforms is urgent and compelling, because inefficient administration would frustrate plans for nation building. A good beginning for a rethink on reforms in administration is to go back on concepts in organisations study and evaluate their relevance for public administration. This chapter hopes to generate interest in this direction.

In public administration, more than elsewhere, ideas are rejected partly because "we have tried them before and they haven't worked". For example separation of the ministry and the executing agency is by no means a new idea for public administration. The identity of the two has merged in the last twenty five years or so. We need to examine what gains, or loss to effectiveness of administration has resulted from the merger of the two

functions. If conceptually the separation between the two is desirable, what should be done to make it effective?

Being an open system, governments are concerned with the general public's acceptability of what they do. When an outside committee with membership of respected citizens and experienced persons makes recommendations, their credibility is established. In fact, however, the direction of recommendations is often ensured by the membership of the committee (Dayal et. al 1975). Most policy committees in agriculture, for example, include two or three common members whose approach is generally acceptable to government. The overall results are often influenced indirectly by the appointment of members to committees. This strategy prevents violent changes in the system. However, this caution prevents the break from the established approach and does not leave enough room for new ideas to grow.

Two considerations are relevant in respect to the strategy of change in administration. One, the input needed to diagnose and devise measures for improving organisational performance needs technical expertise; and two, the changes needed may have to involve questioning the fundamental thesis on structuring the work of government, as against mere adjustment of departments. Hence, the approach to bringing about reform may have to change, as discussed earlier.

The Fulton Committee in the UK which submitted its report on the reforms of the civil service, had made basic changes in recruitment, selection, training of civil servants and for increasing application of management systems that had proved effective in large organisations. The responsibility for implementation was assigned to Lord Armstrong, a senior civil servant and one who had sympathetic reaction to Fulton's recommendations. A searching review of the achievements ten years after the report's acceptance reveal that few of the major recommendations had been put into effect and the shortcomings that were highlighted by Fulton Committee persist (Garrett, 1980). Fulton report was expected to revolutionise the civil service in the UK and usher in modernisation of the management of the government. The evaluation suggests that it did no such thing. The civil service that had to work on the integrated grading system, training, introduction of specialists in government, etc., could not be achieved for one reason or another, notwithstanding the repeated reference to these by the Expenditure Committee of the Parliament. The experience of Udoji Commission in Nigeria and the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in India was the same. Reporting on the implementation of ARC's recommendations, the Department of Personnel & Administrative Reforms claims:

There are 527 recommendations concerning the central government, out of which parts of five also concern the state governments. Decisions have been taken in respect to 506 recommendations fully and ten others partly which also include those five recommendations concerning both central and state governments.

The impact of the changes on public services and decision making is hardly noticeable. How then can the system become more suitable to manage the tasks of the government? As failures have accumulated over the years and hopes have remained unfulfilled, urgency for better efforts to improve performance has become more insistent.

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