

CHANGE: ADMINISTRATION AND ADAPTATION*

by Masood Hasan

IS it not painfully obvious to us that change is in and around us, that whatever institutions we have are ill-equipped to handle change because we have always preferred to "budget" for the status quo. "There is nothing more difficult to take in and, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of things, because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the law". (Machlavelli – The Prince).

This was said by a functionalist quite sometime ago, was never so true then as now, with an important difference ie time and distance have almost no meaning in our world today. The Concorde has already gone on its maiden flight. When it travels at 1,400 kmph, imagine it covering the Karachi, London run in 4 hours or so; you will get to London before you left Karachi! The result of this exponential growth in science and technology is complexity. The first is that of awesome accumulation of the written word and the second is that the sum of the parts refuse to add up to the whole. This is a problem faced by administrations all sorts everywhere, particularly on account of the traditional time lag between significant scientific, technological and (let us not forget) social changes along with the need to accept and adapt to them, has become non-existent.

It should be quite obvious that we are getting progressively lesser and lesser time to react/adapt to change. It should be quite obvious that attempts to prop and bolster institutions/organisations that cannot attain their objectives despite all their creaking and groaning, require being rejuvenated.

It should be known that within the last decade or so there have been terrific advances in the concepts of the types of institutions (social, economic, scientific or technological) that must evolve to absorb the impact of change. It should be known that the size of organized effort must continue to increase for the economies of scale are there to meet the challenge of change with the lease dislocation. This calls for an understanding of what exactly are the diseases afflicting our institutions that have grown prematurely old. After all, Pakistan is just about 21 years o age!

We do know that plans made in the domestic, provincial or national sphere are obsolete, in many ways, the moment they are born. But what is paramount importance is that the process that created the plan must live on because it provides the only way to take care of changes. We can only hope that better ways and means are determined to create a process that to a large extent, at least at the lower levels, is self-regulating. Contact with the lower levels, amongst others, leaves much to be desired out here.

But how do we get about creating such a state of affairs? For is it not commonly said that the average human being in the average organisation is satisfied with average

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performance all the time. What is so difficult to understand, is that: it is not possible to maintain average (acceptable?) performance unless we are *consciously continuously trying to improve upon the old*. This calls for an analytical effort. Have we not all read in *Alice-in-Wonderland* about having to move twice as fast in order to maintain the existing state of affairs?

It follows, therefore, change—even for the better—involves being dissatisfied with what exists. Qualitatively such dissatisfaction is meaningless unless it gives rise to an attempt to quantify the causes which have given birth to such an attitude in the first instance. When the frame work of any type of organized effort gets fossilized the system starts misfiring. In order to understand why the system is misfiring calls for an orderly investigation of the situation “as is where is”. There is no bench-mark in situations such as this which speaks out thus “At this stage let us attempt to understand the existing situation by ensuring an objective look around”. The benchmark must “arrive” in the minds of men, and one can only hope that the penny drops in those minds belonging to those who first, have the courage and secondly, the foresight and thirdly, the authority to ensure the use of the scientific method. The fact that there are not “homines quot senttentiae” (as many opinions as people) should not deter one from braving the effort. There has been far too much fragmentation in the approaches to problem solving to permit arriving at the best solutions without relating all the conflicting viewpoints into a logical oneness. This calls for new approaches, the tradition is totally inadequate. Can we not observe this fact?

We must understand that inefficiency appeals to the inefficient. Those, who are well meaning but asleep need to be jolted out of the comfortable rut in which they are ambling without so much as looking to their left or right. Those who are aware but deliberately look askance are twice guilty. May they be guided, we hope by some inner force. It is true that the average human being is not basically resistant to change. He has become resistant because he has learnt most probably to his detriment in his earlier years, that any attempt to be original resulted in his fingers being severally rapped. It is therefore, much easier to let things ride. The result of such attitudes is directly responsible for the unsatisfactory state of affairs that exist in most of our institutions or large organisations in the country today. This attitude is made worse when after a prolonged period of letting things ride, we start justifying the same in terms of real benefits to the organisation itself. We should normally associate inefficiency with age. As mentioned, before we can say that by and large very many of our organisations are suffering from it prematurely (because they are hardly 21 years old as of now)! Are those in authority in such organizations aware of what is going on within their organization not to talk of the rest of the world? There are many answers to this question a few go as follows: who cares, or I do not have time, or what goes on else where has no effect in any mosque of one and a half bricks (to paraphrase the urdu) or I have spent a lifetime in this how can anyone teach me anything or show me how the new way actually works and so on, the last comment is the most dangerous of the lot because we all jolly well know that is cannot be shown to work without first creating the infrastructure for acceptance to make it work, and this is precisely the situation that this loaded question sets out to create in the first instance. This is the tragedy of continuing to apply outmoded solutions to present day

problems. One may say that creating the proper infrastructure for acceptance of the use of the scientific method requires but passive acceptance. Nothing short of this is required to generate progress.

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