

TOWARDS MORE EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION*

by Masood Hasan

We are being given progressively less and less time to assess and react to change. This means we must throw away the traditional way of doing things because it is obvious that it doesn't work. To do this it is necessary to take stock of the situation. There are no short cuts here. This is the paradox of increasing complexity that it is taking longer and longer to understand matters, yet we must act quicker. It is taking longer and longer because the traditional way of doing things is of little help, in fact, many a time it creates more trouble than it sets out to solve. The use of the systematic or scientific approach makes possible formalization (in the good sense) of the management process. The construction of such a foundation is the necessary base for increased productivity.

SINCE we are wedded to the proposition that economic development is desirable, it follows that we must be concerned directly with increasing productivity. It matters little whether it means increasing a machine's output, or a teacher getting across to his pupils new ideas quicker, or a manager/administrator conserving his time, or a work study expert evolving improved ways and means of performing a certain operation, or the courts of law dispensing with justice in a shorter period of time, or decreasing the amount of paper-work required for doing a piece of work....

Have we not felt at times increasingly frustrated with the low output of machines, the standards of education, the involvement of managers/administrators in file work and notings, the resistance to new ways of doing things just because they are new, the lengthy legal procedures in an effort to secure justice?

This means we must make strenuous attempts to find out what is causing all these difficulties. Making strenuous efforts without proper direction can hardly be expected to yield satisfactory results.

COMPULSION

At this stage we must ask ourselves whether such situations have cropped up elsewhere and if so, what was done about it. The fact is: that all the developed countries have and are coming up against the same frustrations from time to time. Since their economies are very much less protected than ours there is an additional force, apart from frustration, that has compelled them to do something about such situations in a hurry: this is the force of competitive conditions.

It is accepted that developing countries have to pay the price for trying to compress what took a century in the West into a quarter of the time out here. The price is: regulation of the economy of the country to permit the institutions of industry to get off the ground quickly. When we talk of regulation we come up against measurement. For how can you

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regulate unless you know what it is that you are dealing with, both quality-wise and quantity-wise? This means we must adopt a systematic (scientific) way of analysis to find out what must be done first. After all, we must be careful to treat the disease and not its symptoms.

In war when an enemy wishes to ensure best advantage to himself, what does he do? He attempts to paralyze the communications/distribution system---whether it is the electricity system, the railway system, the telephone system, the shipping system or the mass media oral communication arrangements in the form of the broadcasting system. Communication is the life-blood of a nation. If we look at our own human system the same position obtains. If we touch a hot object the reflex action is to withdraw the hand immediately. What happens is that a message is communicated through our nervous system and the reaction is brought about by a message being relayed back to the muscles controlling the movement of the hand to remove it. The whole process takes place so quickly that we tend to ignore how vitally important the movement of information is.

It should be quite clear, therefore, that the role of communications is of paramount importance in the national (not to talk of the international) and individual spheres.

Obstructions in the flow, one way or the other, cause the system to suffer defeat from a blocked coronary or otherwise. Looking at the interminable delays that we experience in our administrative machine we must, therefore, be forced to believe that something is lacking. The missing factor naturally enough is the lack of proper information because of the communication channels having got clogged up, or the channels just do not exist where they should.

To a very large extent the problem facing our administration today is one of moving information about so as to ensure that various isolated actions all move in the same direction so as to attain the objective that we have set for ourselves, ie increasing our productivity.

Can we learn from the way others have got about solving this terribly complex problem of co-ordination for purposes of better control? If we refuse to learn we can be quite sure all attempts to increase our GNP (however, this is not necessarily a measure of productivity) will come to grief. The institutions that are the vehicle of attaining this objective require disciplining of effort which connotes organizing one's thinking systematically.

In order to achieve higher and higher productivity we must constantly ask ourselves the question---is there a better way of doing what we are doing or if we are not doing this, how can we get about doing it? This requires inconveniencing ourselves to do our homework. Otherwise, what follows is delaying or postponing action which is equivalent to taking the easy way out---abandonment.

Let us, therefore, create an attitude which is problem-focused, ie my problem is so-and-so, how can I get about solving so-and-so rather than getting involved in niggling

meaningless details which are totally irrelevant. At this stage we come up against our traditional way of doing things. They are totally inadequate. So it will be best to find out the shape and size of our communication (information) networks because we cannot make or take decisions without this commodity (information).

A body of knowledge, which is expanding at an exponential rate, has been built up in the last 10 years or so to come to grips at an even level with such frustrating inefficiencies. It uses the scientific method and is more commonly known as System Analysis.

Unfortunately Systems Analysis is not like a "do-it-yourself-kit-of-things." It requires a minimum of a formal bias which comes through instruction (training). Our present post-experience institutions are inadequate to meet this challenge on two counts. First, since the main theme is interchange of experiences amongst those attending such courses, they cannot obviously interchange knowledge that they have not got! Second, instruction in familiarization with new concepts developed in the last decade is woefully inadequate. To rectify this is not an easy matter, because in order to benefit from concepts/techniques developed and successfully used by others we must not only assimilate, but modify them before their application in order to ensure success out here.

The importance of training as a continuous process is, therefore, manifest. Without continuously bringing or knowledge up to date---in a world of increasing complexity---we can be quite sure we will be making use of effete and obsolete ways and means of problem-solving. If we then wonder why we do not get the results that we expected in the first instance, should we not ponder? One of our main administrative shortcomings is to ignore the need to bring our knowledge at all levels of the hierarchy up to date, either through self-learning or instruction. We all complain of not having enough time to get away from the routine daily grind. Well, the routine daily grind will never let you have time for anything else unless you consciously go for it. What after all, is our objective; the attainment of satisfaction out of the daily routine of paper shuffling or actually bothering about increasing productivity through achievement. Are the traditional worn-out systems and procedures or accomplishment to work more important? There can be no two answers to this question.

To obtain the benefits that better organized countries have achieved the only way is to objectively evaluate the nature and size of the problem.

It is precisely this attitude that brought forth the Fulton Committee's recommendations in the U.K. which were accepted by the British Government without any delay. The emphasis there is now on the implementation of these recommendations. It is obvious that our administrative system derives its present-day thinking out of concepts which no longer apply or hold good in our world of today. Do not our administrative frustrations point this way?

The implications of change and its speed are increasing as we go along. This means we must come to grips with the technology of today, be it in helping us in increasing our agricultural productivity or industrial. This new technology is creating the necessity for a

new environment to accommodate it. For example, if we have a surplus of wheat (which I am told we can expect) then the problem is not limited to merely ensuring a continued seed supply of improved disease resistance strains to make sure that the increased agricultural productivity will continue. It will involve facilities such as bulk storage and the communications necessary to permit such storage, which means the construction of such stores and planning their location and providing the finances and acquiring the materials of construction.... It may affect the fixation of the Government price for wheat. If it has to be exported it may involve the transportation arrangement down to Karachi and may then require special shipping arrangements. The foreign exchange earnings would then be utilized in new and on-going projects which would in turn... Regulating the flow mentioned above can only come through a reliable network of information (communications). Only then will we be able to gather all the data required so as to evaluate what line of action holds out the best promise of obtaining the highest productivity.

Those who are in a position to do so will do well to pause and reflect. The difficulty lies in the human minds resistance to accepting the new. As Isaac Asimov says: "Does a man in an airplane, glorying in crossing the continent in six hours, feel demeaned because it is the plane that did it and not his own unaided legs?" Aids to improved administrative effectiveness can only come by familiarization with new concepts and what is equally important by attempting to translate them into practice. There is no tradition here; whoever has been bold and adventuresome has advanced far.

Because the economies of scale are forcing larger administrative units on us we must understand that sheer size creates similar problems (in form, at any rate) whether organizations are situated in the West, the South Pole or Pakistan. By avoiding the errors made elsewhere in solving problems of such complexity we can advantageously make use of the privilege of the late-comer by the leap-frogging those things that deserve to be by-passed and this certainly not through qualitative generalizations, but through quantitative evaluation.

This must ultimately lead to a new way of executive thinking which will be able to cut a wide swath through the administrative jungles of the different departments comprising a system (organization). This will make it possible for individuals to concentrate on the objectives as a whole rather than considering the solving of departmental problems as being of prime importance to the exclusion of all else.

In this competitive world we do not have the luxury of time because the "new environment" has made old strategies obsolete. And even this "new environment" is constantly changing. We must learn the value of being able to look at a problem square in the face and then act in such a fashion that our attention is kept on solving the problem, all else is irrelevant.

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