

## ON RAISING PRODUCTIVITY\*

by Masood Hasan

The routine administrator deals with cases based on tradition or precedent which may have been set years ago to solve "similar" situation problems. This method of work ensures that a conservative outlook is brought to bear on problem-solving effort. Generally, the possibility of assuming responsibility for novel approaches or innovation, which may be troublesome, is ignored. This method of work also ensures continuity of the administrative process of the kind that pushes the creative faculties of the administrator behind the back of beyond, which is so greatly loved and admired by the plodding bureaucrat.

The "modern" public administration process is around 80 years old and it is presumed that there is enough of an accretion of precedent to deal with varying situations that arise from time to time. And if this is not so, is it not easy to make adjustments by making minor alterations in ground-level procedures! Since most of the procedures are valid for no more than five years, when some "minor" revisions are required, it does not take much imagination to visualize how many revisions have been made to thousands of procedures over the last 20 years or so. This is especially true where the administrator/manager has a lot of discretionary authority.

### VAST CHANGE

Over the years there has been a very significant shift in the composition of taxes. Once upon a time land revenue provided the bulk of the rupee intake. Now, with Excise Duties, Income Tax, Corporation Tax, Sales Tax and Sea Customs having escalated 30 to 40 times their 1947/48-level, land revenue has fallen far, far behind. The nature of the administrative/managerial difficulties has changed, if only on account of size alone. But we consistently refuse to accept this fact of life because it inconveniences us.

The development is a process hardly 12 years old. Development is concerned, in the main, with projects or programmes. No one project or programme is ever the same as another. This means we cannot find the kind of precedent or tradition that routine administration habitually looks for. Invariably, we find that attempts are made to use the old straitjacket of public administration for the development process or development administration. Little wonder then that our autonomous institutions have not achieved the high promise they had set out with. Because of the carryover of old attitudes, autonomous institutions were set up to avoid the cumbersome traditional administrative red-tape and to develop a commercial attitude towards work accomplishment. They have ended up by absorbing the worst features of both the Government (public) and private managerial processes. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating of it, and are the symptoms not meaningful?

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\* Pakistan Times, March 23 1972.



When dealing with development administration we are dealing with projects of one kind or another. It has to be understood that mere insistence on traditional methods of control does little or nothing to reduce waste. In fact, it increases waste. The routine administrator is not bothered as it is "legal". Again, a system designed primarily for facilitating administrative/managerial performance may fall short of the essential requirements of audit and result in serious lapses and irregularities. What then is required is to find the proper balance between the requirements of rigorous accuracy on the one hand and considerations of speed and efficiency in performance on the other. It is possible to do so; it has been done elsewhere.

## REVIEWS

The first and foremost requirement is a scientific assessment of the existing situation, call it a review if you may. Such reviews are accepted as a condition precedent elsewhere towards improving administrative/managerial efficiencies. Ideally, such reviews should be on a continuous basis. This means the necessary machinery/system must be consciously and deliberately designed to achieve that end. The shorter the time intervals between the reviews the better the chances of improved control. Those familiar with the computer will recognize the approaching similarity to "real time".

All managerial/administrative activity boils down to two and only two activities, ie of handling information and of making decisions. This implies the necessity of having good information or reporting systems, call them nervous systems if you may. Since all hierarchical or organized systems are upwards funneling information filtration systems one does not know, by definition, what information has been left or thrown out by one's subordinate or the subordinate's subordinate. This happens because the administrator/manager budgets for his future manpower, future cash and future requirements of facilities but he does not "budget" because he does not know how to, for his future requirements of information which must certainly keep on increasing. If anywhere activities do not grow they contract, first, relatively and then absolutely because the markets local and foreign, and opportunities are expanding all the time. By just standing still—by maintaining the "status quo"—one loses the extra share of the market and/or its extra promise in opportunities.

It is easy, therefore, to take "policy" decisions regarding improving efficiencies. One of the most popular is that of "reorganization". Reorganisation, by itself, will not achieve its objective. Organisations which at their higher levels reflect the composition of their lower levels have the best chance of success because they create a minimum of frustration. To that extent a suitable organisation structure facilitating the flow of work is required. Reorganisation which follows an understanding of the problems at ground level or procedural level is the only type of reorganization that will ultimately succeed. This is because such an analysis has to involve individuals in helping to design change for themselves. This motivates individuals to better performance because they feel they have a personal stake in the process. The problems that we have faced, are facing, and will be facing demand resolution. It appears, always in less time than we would like to have at our disposal.

In fact, this time shrinkage is alarming for the only short-term "antidote" is to shoot out decisions from a base of ignorance. Even intuition or "finger-spitzengefuhl" is better off if the basis for decision-making is sound. Generally we face three types of uncertainty. The first: on account of lack of complete investigations ie not having done our homework, usually because of having been busy with matters of the moment arising out of the continuing existing mess. The second: due to our inability to predict future conditions. The third: due to imperfect communications, reporting or nervous systems. The sooner we realise that information must be treated as a commodity the sooner we will begin to understand both the magnitude and the nature of our problems, and where "Square 1" is. To measure the depth of water before jumping into it is a fair precaution. Our trouble is that if we do not have a direct and simple means of measuring such depth we "arrive" at the conclusion: that the depth cannot be measured! It takes too much effort.

### **HARD WORK**

It has been said there are four grades of thought: the lowest level being that of day-dreaming, the next higher that of decision-making, the next that of deliberative thought, and finally out of a lot of deliberative thinking, comes some creative thought. This is another way of saying that genius is 99% directed, deliberative perspiration and 1% inspiration. I would venture to add that the 99% precedes the 1%.

Let us make strenuous attempts to make use of symptoms as our allies/friends in order to arrive at the disease proper, viz of not maintaining minds closed to new approaches just because it inconveniences us. This must force a totally unfamiliar method on us and that is to look inwards and improve ourselves rather than looking outwards and blaming others for our own faults. It will then be possible to change the current attitude of thinking preventively with change and curatively towards inefficiencies. After all, curative is short-term and preventive long-term.

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