

What is Professionalization of Experience?

By
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Our colleges/universities teach students in the time honored fashion, making a start from laws, theories or hypotheses (general statements), e.g., a start may be made with the 'law of multiple proportions' with the 'laws of motion' etc. This method of instruction involves moving from the general statement to the particular instance. Teachers having made the general statement then give examples to prove that the hypothesis, theory or law enunciated is correct, e.g., a stone dropping from a height of 32 ft. does in fact actually take one second, giving the value of 'g'. This method of imparting knowledge, it is hoped, helps to inculcate the faculty of being able to think independently---by relating theory to examples given in the classroom.

Considering government service, at least for the higher grades, after a student enters service, he or she currently undergoes instruction more or less on the college/university lines, may be with a few different subjects thrown in but the main thrust remains the same, i.e., of imparting knowledge as in a classroom.

After completion of what is called pre-entry 'training' and having entered practical life the individual starts to deal with real life day-to-day situations, not hypotheses, not theories, not laws. In this fashion over the years he would be concerned with an increasing series of particular events or happenings or cases and so it is hoped accumulate a large inventory of discrete experiences.

At some stage, after having acquired a sufficient number of discrete experiences, the officer must be taken away from the daily routine, may be for about one or two months, and be sent to a training institution where properly qualified instructors would attempt to help the officer relate his discrete or particular experiences to some general statement which is the same thing as saying that he would try to recognize patterns in his inventory of experiences as hypotheses, theories or even laws depending, of course, on the number of observations made, etc., etc.

The time that should elapse before the officer is pulled out from his day-to-day work and be given such an opportunity would be dependent on an appraisal of his performance. Such performance of appraisal would be dependent to a large extent on Job Analysis of which job evaluation, job specification and job description form essential parts. Whether the elapsed time is 3, 4, 5 or 6 years is another matter. But from the point of view of being able to assist in developing of a professional attitude towards work the completion of the loop between practice and theory would be bridged (and indeed good practice does indeed produce excellent theory) by providing the necessary insights in this fashion. It is

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this bridge between practice and theory of which we are so surely deficient in administrative work in Pakistan, which is another way of saying practice and theory are unrelated, therefore, the twain never do nor can meet out here.

The advantages that accrue in gaining such insights help to provide a very firm basis to the individual in understanding what the scientific, empirical or inductive method means. From such a comprehension, given the interminable complexities in organizational endeavour which increase the higher up the ladder the individual progresses, the officer would be helped to move forward with a new confidence, now lacking, in decision-making.

The important point is that the effort faced with problems with unpredictable outcomes (in certain avenues of efforts more, in others less) would yet be able to move with a measure of confidence. The crutch providing the necessary assistance being the scientific method. Indeed theory is only of value if it has predictive value.

There are several who find it virtually impossible to "graduate" by creating this conceptual bridge in their mind. Such individuals can be recognized very easily by the facility with which they can reel off the content of a problem solved by them in the past: the executive-by-anecdote type. The form of the problem has eluded him, typically in 21 years' service he has acquired 3 years experience 7 times! This can be called "when I was an Assistant Commissioner in Khulna" syndrome.

A corollary of the above is that it steers absolutely clear of the specialist/generalist controversy by clearly stating the requirements of an administrator/executive. It also follows that a professional attitude towards work will only be engendered by remaining at one's original type of work for a given length of time, say 7 years, whether it be commercial, industrial, revenue, law and order, or agricultural administration. This also means the officer in the initial 7 years will have acquired *deep subject matter* knowledge of what he is dealing with at the ground level where the physical transactions actually take place. After the seventh year of service, subject to aptitude and performance appraisal the concerned individual can opt for a more general career (having professionalized his experience) or remain in his specialism and develop in that direction. It would be incorrect to conclude from the above that the only type of training required has to be based on the individual's capability of generalizing his real life experiences. Far from it, other types of training are yet required whether it concerns use of new materials of construction, new methods of planning, new methods of ensuring a sound and equitable tax administration, new methods of cost accounting or setting up a new air defence system.

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