CO-ORDINATION AS A PART OF THE* ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

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The author suggests that effective co-ordination requires a properly designed information flow system and calls for an approach that recognizes the involvement of all concerned.

If an organization survives in the long term, the chances are that it will continue to grow larger and hence more complex. To be sure, the organization will require an increasing number of personnel to run it efficiently or otherwise. When looking into organizations three aspects require consideration:

- the structure
- the personnel
- the operating systems and procedures

I believe we have had plenty of experience in modifying or altering structures. The centralized has been decentralized. The decentralized has been centralized and this may have happened more than once in certain cases, whatever the compulsions may have been. We have also changed Mr. X for Mr. Y and Mr. Y for Mr. Z. The fact that we continue to insist that personal push is required to get anything worthwhile done and then continue that way....hence structural alterations have not delivered the goods. There can be no doubt that a structure is an essential ingredient of an organization. In mechanics, we are told force can only be transmitted through a structure. Likewise organizational structures form the basis for transmitting decisions and obtaining feed-back on performance. It is felt, very often that decisions made acquire fuzziness in their transmission downwards and feedback reports reporting on implementation many a time resemble fairy tales. In addition it may take far too long to find out what is going on. Geographical dispersion coupled with centralization of decision making also makes it difficult to know the facts. It would appear attention should now be paid to the third aspect ie the operating systems and procedures, which forms the nervous system of the organization. Procedures are added on, discarded, modified or amended several times in an unplanned, unbudgeted and uncoordinated fashion. Little wonder that it is possible to find (with a little bit of effort) conflicting precedents for similar cases or similar precedents for conflicting cases. There can be little doubt that a good look at exposing the existing channels or paths of movement of information in a systematic fashion is required.

The physical flow of work is conditioned by the flow of the related paper work. There may be a time lag between the movement of paperwork (information) and the physical accomplishment of work, but there is a direct correspondence between the two. This is of importance because administrators, managers or executives are involved in two---and only two---activities ie of handling information and of making decisions. And because of

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current limitations it leads to various individuals adding on to the mass of existing ad hoc accretion of procedures, which is consistent with the cult of the individual. Questions such as, how accurate is the budget may be asked. If, say, arbitrary cuts of 20% have been imposed on certain estimates over the years, what is there to prevent a 25% inflated estimate in the first place? Whether this is done is of far less importance than knowing whether it is actually done or not. Who allows for the "margins of safety" and at how many stages is the little extra added on? It is possible to give several examples which throw up the difficulties in studying existing paths of information-flow and observe that difficulties do not lie so much in identifying the facts, whence they come, and where they go, but in understanding how administrators or executives interpret what is said or conveyed to them along with the motives that determine their actions and explanations. If management were an exact science, problems would not only be identified easily but the information needs would also be quantified clearly. The bright young men who come along with a check list in one hand and a bundle of techniques in the other, sometimes find it difficult to disguise their contempt for a person who can neither define the existing situation accurately enough for appropriate action nor identify what technique can deliver the goods. It is not surprising that little confidence exists between them, especially when the analyst's next move could very well be to start questioning the validity of the manager's/administrator's objectives. This is a great pity because there is a great need for such questioning for it is through framing the right questions that we can progress systematically. This implies ways and means must be found to involve individuals within the organization to do the questioning *themselves* and so to build up an organizational picture (like maps of varying scales depending what depth of detail is required), in other words "system mapping". There are no rewards or prizes for finding forms of statements which go nowhere, or routine reports painstakingly prepared which have not been used since the previous incumbent was transferred. Such "discoveries" are all too easy to achieve. Different people have different information needs to carry out the same jobs. And jobs themselves are dynamic. So no information system is likely to be what is required for long. What is more, the amount of information needed is probably inversely proportional to the effect. This arises because a clearly defined problem will have precise information needs. Whereas, if a problem is much more information will be asked for to provide what is hoped will be relevant background. This may sound depressing but it does highlight that any existing system will be found far from perfect and an objective look-see indeed provides the basis for generating improvements on what exists. This implies an examination of the various stages of information-flow origination to collection thence on to validation, storage, processing and finally to its presentation. The process that ensures that an information-flow system is properly designed and installed (capital investment) and then adequately maintained (revenue expenditure) creates the required nervous system and *this is what co-ordination demands.* Because administrative systems are large, authority has to be delegated. The method of delegation resembles the way knowledge has developed. Knowledge has grown up over the years through the generation of a number of disciplines in a compartmentalized fashion. Similarly, organizations have grown up over the years through the device of functional specialization which is the analogue of knowledge compartmentalization. This means when authority is delegated it is similar to fragmentation in which a subordinate oversees only a particular facet of the overall canvas of organizational endeavour. Therefore, those

lower down in the hierarchy do not have access to the total picture. This means *the basis for ensuring effective co-ordination must start at the higher reaches of the administrative process.* Since the infrastructure of an organization develops over a period of time history presents us with the framework that defines the levels of authority at any particular moment.

Not so very long ago the administrative pace was very leisurely compared to the present day. There was enough time to modify structures before problems became critical and by and large movement appeared satisfactory even if somewhat ponderously heavy while exhibiting no more than a little hesitation. There did appear to be a strong sense of direction. And indeed there was. The objective was to ensure Law and Order.

However, in the past two and a half decades or so with the state's increasing emphasis on development, consideration of serial time takes on a new significance almost entirely. This significance is further sharpened through the ease with which persons can communicate with one another thousands of miles away almost immediately, but yet it may take as long as a day to get through to almost next door! The feelings of the faster moving on the road because of being held up by slower moving traffic generates a sense of frustration, though it should help us to realize that the strength of a chain is only a strong as its weakest link. Development administration is concerned with obtaining value added positive results and law and order must assume the regulatory negatively oriented character of a hygiene factor meant to allow development – a very necessary prerequisite, but it does not necessarily follow that it provides the inspiration to initiate development. Though law and order does form part of the means for development it is not an end in itself. When elevated to becoming an end an organization becomes more and more procedurally oriented which is usually at the cost of obtaining results, which means inefficient development and certainly more and more paperwork and greater faith in the individual at the cost of institutionalization of a systematic way of doing things.

Co-ordination in an essentially law and order society/organization is comparatively simple as little or no emphasis is required to be paid to generating value added activities which must probe far into the future. In large measure the telephone, telex and relatively quick transportation can take care of most law and order situations, as concern is usually with things that have just happened or are just about to happen. But when development is accepted as a means towards attaining social objectives a shift or transition is necessary to help generate the proper attitudes towards encouraging conditions which can help motivate individuals to move in the direction of increasing value added, after all the time horizons have altered completely. Finally, it remains the responsibility of the state to ensure widescale dispersion of the fruits of such productive efforts. It is under these conditions that co-ordination ensures that various functional specialisms are brought together in such a way that one plus one results in something greater than two rather than minus one. Are we not thoroughly familiar with this phenomenon?

Co-ordination at one time could be equated entirely with personal co-operation. This is no longer valid. Those who find it difficult to accept this statement should measure the correctness of their thoughts against the demonstrated frustrations of the many. Of course

this does not mean personal co-operation is not required. There can be no doubt that it is required, but only as a hygiene factor that ensures the ground is clear to move ahead. Formal co-ordination can no longer be oversimplified to mean the efficient use of the telephone, telex and travel or the increasing numbers of meetings. For if it were, nothing is missing, yet we know something is.

To get things done requires a decision or a series of decisions. And decisions require updating or being modified from time to time. A decision is a mere moment in a process. Reiterating, we know administrators or executives are involved in but only two activities, that of handling information and of making decisions. It follows, when a decision is about to be made its quality will depend in large measure on the timeliness and quality of relevant information available at that particular moment.

Woodrow Wilson in his famous essay on "The Study of Administration" in 1887 characterized administration as a "field of business" and stated that "the object of administrative study is to rescue executive methods from the confusion and costliness of (continued) empirical experiment and set them upon foundations laid deep in stable principle" (word in brackets mine). Surely practice without a supporting theory ultimately is a farce. Equally surely good practice can produce good theory (in that order, ie practice first, theory second, because inspiration is drearily infrequent!) to avoid continued trial and error or reinventing the wheel. But this can only happen if a properly directed effort is started off to produce the missing theory, which in Woodrow Wilson's word is "stable principle".

In large administrative systems the biggest obstacle to change arises most often from social factors, we therefore, need to apply ourselves to people before we can apply ourselves to problems. Social factors emerge as more important than technical know-how or equipment. This fact of life must be accepted if a successful method of approach is to be worked out. Whenever improvements are desired, a definition of the existing situation provides the point of departure, but such definition is not as easy as it sounds. However, if an evaluation of the existing situation is designed to involve those within the organization what could be better than that? And if this method of approach helps to develop the "stable principle" what could be yet better than that. Unfortunately tradition or precedent is not helpful because it does not recognize that organizations as they grow in complexity ie size, that even through the work done at the middle lower and lower levels remains much the same over the years, that at the higher reaches the nature of the problem is qualitatively different. At the lower levels the clerk is filling in the same type of papers (may be with a ballpoint and not a quill pen) as years ago, the engine driver the same controls (may be electronic push buttons instead of clumsy levers) as years ago and the port crane loader handling the same type of crates again as years ago. Yet the nature of problems thrown high up have altered.

It will not be out of place to mention the stages through which a sizeable project may have to go through and this process could take even seven years to fruition from the initial proposal leading to:

- feasibility study

- location determination
- optimum scope determination
- project team appointment
- licencing arrangements
- definite fixed investment estimate
- appropriation of funds
- fixed investment estimates for control
- final financial evaluation
- staff reviews
- operational hazard studies
- choice of design contractor
- choice of construction/erection contractor
- obtaining top administrative approval
- detailed engineering design
- ordering long lead items
- site preparation
- ordering other equipment
- construction
- running in

It is quite certain nothing of the sort could have imagined a generation ago. The time span of anything really significant today usually carries over longer then the tenure of an individual. Hence the necessity to institutionalize the process so that we become less individual dependent thereby routinizing a number of functions which a well co-ordinated system can take over.

When precedent does not help, can anything else provide us assistance? The answer is to use our powers of observation, of logic and reasoning of following an approach that is defined (well structured) in attacking the unknown: such as is required when making a plan for the future (this approach is the opposite when we deal with Control because we know exactly what has happened so can decide on one of several approaches). In any case an unstructured or unplanned approach to an unstructured or undefined problem will in all eventuality create confusion and get us nowhere.

The approach must recognize, that at the "lower administrative levels" the methods of work, because of their involvement in detail are associated with data or information gathering (increase in sensory variety) ie with what is handled, whereas the "higher administrative levels" are associated with data condensation or abstraction (decrease in variety). If this were not so the boss would be able to do everything by himself, of himself, for himself ie the organization would be small and we are not talking of small organizations. Use of our powers of observation is indeed enjoined upon us. The spread of Islam after assimilation of knowledge from other languages led to its explosive expansion. The time test of any effort lies in its being judged from the standpoint of its output or achievements. Look at the correlation of observed phenomena by Abu Ali Al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (al-Hazen) in optics, by Kamal al-din al-Farsi on the rainbow halo effect, by al-Khwarizm Mohammad ibn Musa in creating Hisab al-jabr wal muqabla

(algebra) and that the word algorithm derives from his name, by al-Kharizm abu Abdullah Mohammad bin Ahmed bin Ahmed bin Yusaf who wrote the Key of the Sciences, by Omar Khayyam and his cubic equations and there is much more… And to imagine some of this goes back a thousand years!

When Muslims ignored natural experience, the torch of learning through the Renaissance, was taken over by Southern Europe. History repeated itself and the Reformation moved the spirit of objective enquiry to Northern Europe and then it crossed the Atlantic over to North America. How can we encourage the spirit of enquiry, which is the essence of progress? As brought out earlier, it must involve individuals within the system to be part of a team who will be made responsible to define the existing state of affairs. The team will have on it representatives of varying backgrounds, because problems have a nasty habit of not presenting themselves neatly labeled as purely legal, purely engineering, purely medical or purely personnel . . . Problems come reflecting several facets. Therefore, those involved in such an investigation must also represent several backgrounds. Further, in order to assist in bringing in improvements, those in authority at various levels must also be involved. Hence ways and means for such active involvement must be found. This is a systematic approach in which it is possible to approach the unknown. But how does all this concern co-ordination? It had been brought out earlier that administrators or executives are only handling information and making decisions and that the information handling process or the nervous system is more important than the decision itself. Hence emphasis on an accurate definition of existing information flows is important. The systems maps must be made---several large maps for the lower levels ('B' below) which spreads over the entire terrain or organisation obviously obscuring a lot of the detail. It is important that there must be a common relationship in the different scale maps. Since 'B' is derived from 'A' the relationship is assured. An idea may be obtained referring to the diagram below:

The view at 'A' of an organization can be taken in by one person. The magnified view of part of 'A' is shown at 'B' procedure number 9 or 61, could require a large number of individuals. 'A' would be the policy or strategic level and 'B' the procedural or tactical level. To introduce this sort of mapping there is a method. It requires consideration that there are two types of training: on-the-job and off-the-job. And there are two sub-types ie functional or general/control/co-ordinative. In the country we have relatively a sufficient amount of functional training in various specialisms both on and off-the-job in several academies, institutes of pubic administration and staff colleges including in-house versions in some of the larger organizations. What we do not have is general/control/co-ordinative training on-the-job. This is what is required. Its absence is also highlighted by the fact that our countrymen when they go abroad are very much more productive (generating much more value added) than at home and that too without any additional education or training. It is because they fit in so well at the tactical (procedural) level which is obviously in accordance with a foreigners strategy. So it is not technological competence (or the lack of it) which is to blame, but the "non-technological" factors ie general/control/co-ordinative aspects that require our considered attention. It is this aspect that is required to be brought out in a relevant training programme, given the conditions in the country. It is this approach that will provide the bridge between theory and practice and so produce the currently missing "stable principle."

In the world of today if man enunciates a goal it is possible to achieve it. It is but a matter of investing the requisite resources of manpower, money and facilities. Given the commitment, results are achieved over a period of time. This means if we can define our problems conceptually then conceptual solutions can be found and such solutions can then be translated into real life physical solutions. Just as we set up organizations to manufacture material goods we can create organizations to manufacture the relevant technology or services. In many ways our limitations of attainment are related directly to limitations in conceptually imagining what is attainable. Indeed we shall only get what we strive for "va anlaisa lil insaani illa ma sa-a" (53:39).

Formal co-ordination in large organizations, therefore calls for an approach that recognizes the involvement (to the extent desirable) of all concerned. The mapping of the nervous system which is central to the mode of attack brought out above can be done in such a way to

- involve top administrators through the creation of a small size map (as at 'A' in the diagram) of the existing and proposed information flows
- involve those at the working levels in creation of large size maps (as at 'B' in the diagram). The several maps of this level will mesh in with each other as they have to derive their existence from 'A'. This type of mapping would be done for the existing and proposed detailed information flows

and through this method lay the basis for effective co-ordination formally.

/coordination as a part