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EVALUATION OF PROJECTS: AN ADMINISTRATIVE MISSING LINK

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"……in a world increasingly rushed to death, the long-range waits on the immediate. What is *urgent* takes priority over what is merely *important*, so what is *important* will be attended to only when it becomes urgent, which may be too late."—(L. J. HALLE).

BACKGROUND

A project might be defined as *any non-routine activity which has to meet a dead line*. I do not think we would quarrel with this definition. However, do we not feel or know that projects are dealt with in the traditional routine fashion making it well-nigh impossible to achieve the economies or efficiencies we are so adept at talking about armchairwise but not achieving in practice? Of course, we usually have a convincing story to justify all the bottlenecks, delays and overruns. It is then so easy to rationalize one's own failings by pointing a finger at someone else! It is said *ad nausean* that we are victims of the system or way of doing things and must accept with a degree of fatalism our utter helplessness and inability to do anything about it ! The book of Wisdom admonishes us "Verily We have created man into toil and struggle" (XC-4) and enlightens us that "Surely Allah never changes the condition of a people until they change their own condition...." (XIII-11, similarly in VIII-53). Further, on several occasions the necessity of using our faculties of reasoning, of observation is enjoined "Do you not understand", "Do you not reflect", again, "O my Lord ! Advance me in knowledge" (XX-144). It follows, therefore, quite clearly if rules, regulations and procedures are causing wastages that efforts should be made to modify them for they are certainly not sacrosanct. But this is easier said than done because of the unwillingness of the power structure, in the hands of the bureaucracy, to allow change. This is the impasse faced by governments almost everywhere and is part of a vicious circle. Untenable situations arise which may cause several quick changes, but this does not alter the basic facts causing the trouble in the first instance. The place to break the vicious circle is to improve project administration. An administrator involved in the process of planning should not be confined to administration alone. His

> "capability includes capability to interpret, reinterpret, to advise and even—whether we like it or not—to disobey . . . (this is an extension of) . . . his responsibilities not his powers; for we simultaneously admit the right of politicians, experts and plain citizens to interfere in administration" (Appraising Administrative Capability for Development —UN).

It is pertinent to attempt to understand that the classical training in law and accountancy is least suited to project or development administration and attempting to foist them as panaceas without appraising the altered environment has led to greater disorder. The traditional public administration process is some 80 years old rich with precedent, yes precedent to the extent that we can find conflicting rulings for similar cases. Because, by and large, we are procedurally hidebound there is a carryover of negative attitudes to development work which leads to colossal wastages all round. But because it is "legalized," it is correct.

Semi-autonomous Institutions

In an effort to free itself of the suffocating practices of governmental operations semi-autonomous institutions were set up so as to have the freedom to introduce commercial discipline in their work. We are quite familiar with the results *i.e.*, semi-autonomous institutions have absorbed the worst features of both government departments and private commercial/industrial establishments. Should we not reflect?

Tax Administration

There are several other indicators of the malfunctioning of the administrative process *e.g.* consider Tax Administration : there has been a complete failure in the process of redistribution of wealth. The perpetuation of ancient thought patterns

> "bureaucratic inflexibility, combined with gradual rather than dramatic change in the economic and social structure, is usually the cause of inadequate tax administration. The tax system shows the signs of strain : tax evasion increases, and administration, if not corrected, progressively deteriorates. This results in a sense of growing injustice felt by the tax-payers, which in turn leads to even greater increases in tax evasion" (Tax Administration in Theory and Practice—NOWAK).

A measure of this is given in a publication two years ago stating thatin undeveloped countries Income and Corporation Tax averaged 6% of their GNP and in developed countries 17%. Pakistan's figure was less than 2%! The 4% required to bring us at par with undeveloped countries meant about Rs. 220 crores only. Should we not make an attempt to understand?

Administrative Discretion

Then let us also look at the law and the use of administrative discretion. The two military dictatorships conferred on the bureaucracy (doubtless on a *quid pro quo* basis) almost unlimited and undefined discretion, creating virtually a jungle of administrative lawlessness *i.e.* usurpation and abuse of powers, corruption and inefficiency. Judicial review has fallen short at the interface of control over the legality and a full re-examination of administrative action taken. Does this not call for action?

Accounting Procedures

Yet another field of interest is that of our accounting procedures. Messrs Foster & Whiffin produced a report in 1863, their recommendations are in many ways current after 109 years *i.e.*, single entry cash accounting. Such accounting may be peculiarly suited to dealing with highly predictable events with little or no pipeline problems of carry-over from one year to another such as wages, salaries, TA and DA, but where one year is no longer enough it causes chaos.

> "Until recently one year was enough for three reasons. Firstly, relatively few activities required thought or co-ordinated action which took more than a year to prepare for and these activities could be carried out, typically, on an *ad hoc* basis. Second, relatively few commitments of resources would last for more than one year, and third, when they did, they would not be drastically altered by changes taking place during their economic life. Today all three elements have changed" (Long Range Planning—WARREN).

Added to all this are our artificial creations such as the financial year, the calendar year and the accounting year which do not always coincide with June 30th which all help to amplify problems. Should all this be taken complacently?

The four fields mentioned above *i.e.*, of semi-autonomous institutions, of tax administration, of administrative discretion/judicial law and of accounting procedures all point in one direction and that is : their ways and means cannot cope with present-day complexities associated with the normal public administrative process let alone development or project administration.

Added Complexities

Let us also consider additional complicating factors which help to make the confusion worse confounded. There are several ways of looking at the time/space contraction. Consider the telephone or the teleprinter, the jet aeroplane or the motor car or the very rapid progress made in our generation as compared to all others which Alvin Tofler brings out in his book Future

Shock that if we consider the last 50,000 years of our existence and if each lifetime was of 62 years, there are about 800 life cycles. Of these 650 were spent in caves. Only in the last 70 has man communicated effectively—in writing—from one lifetime to another. The printed word came in the last 6, the accurate measurement of time in the last 4 , the use of electric motors in the last 2 and most of the rest of material development in our lifetime. The progress of transportation speeds likewise has increased tremendously exponentially in our lifetime, in 1880 the steam locomotive attained 100 mph, in 1938 the aeroplane 400 mph, in the 1960 rocket planes about 6,000 mph. and now space capsules ride around at 18,000-25,000 mph. Again the acceptance of the motor car took 40 years from invention to the beginning of it's widespread use, the aeroplane 14 years after the Wright brothers flight at Kitty Hawk, TV 10 years, the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes 7 years and earth satellities for communication 5 years.

In addition, organizations continue to grow in size both at the subnational, national and supranational levels, which means the implication of decisions made are of an even order of magnitude, for better or for worse. This to my way of thinking forms the infrastructure or backdrop to development or project administration. It follows that apart from traditional Legislative and Judicial control of the administration, Administrative Control is also necessary. Article 216 of our Interim Constitution lays the basis for the setting up of Administrative Courts/Tribunals. The jurisdiction of these courts would be independent of that of the Supreme Court and High Courts. When introduced, they will provide the motivation for improving upon existing efficiencies which neither the courts nor legislature can bring about, just look at the record.

Evaluation, Types of

Evaluation can and does mean two different things. Firstly, it means monitoring or keeping a watchful eye on progress with a view to fulfilling within a set time period. Reporting forms the basis of such evaluation and it may or may not lead to corrective action. This evaluation is relatively a short term.

Secondly, it means the assessment of the success or failure or the measurement of the impact of the effort on the economy of the country or ascertaining people's reactions to them and *deriving lessons for the future.* This evaluation is much broader than the first and the politics underlying the objectives would also come in for appraisal.

Short-term evaluation is meant primarily for control and the long-term to provide guidelines for Policy or Strategy formulation. The "ancient" idea of management has been of the efficient and economical use of men, money,

materials, space and time to achieve the laid down goals or predetermined objectives. It has only *now* been realized that management is

> "The development of people, not the direction of things. In other words, if we manage people effectively, successful use of money, materials, time and space will follow"—(ABBOT).

And successful manpower management demands a *system*. This then is the secret of utilizing better ways and means, know-how, technology or techniques. No more, no less. Why is it, despite the fact that we have access to the knowledge of modern management aids, that little or no use is found for them here? More so, as the results of application elsewhere are known to us well enough

—Is it that we lack the capability to understand or the learning itself?

—Or is it that even though we have the capability, we do not wish to be burdened by the facts of a given situation?

—Or is it that we are so used to a particular (comfortable?) way of doing things that any effort out of the 'set' way means countering too much *inertia* which requires Herculean effort?

—Or is it that there is blind adherance to the status quo on account of fear of the unknown?

—Or is it because those in authority with 20/25 years' experience find that it takes a mere 5/6 years now, with present-day management education/aids for new entrants to develop equivalent or even better skills for decision-making, and this creates built-in resistance?

Information

Be that as it may, handling of information is one of the two major activities of managers/administrators.

> "The business of government consists of processing information and taking decisions. The information which has to be processed is very extensive and the decisions which have to be taken are very complex. It is unreasonable to expect Ministers and senior civil servants to manage the business efficiently unless they are supported, on a massive scale, by the techniques of modern information technology" (The Design of Information-Processing Systems for Government—ROBERTSON).

Being able to set up such systems is not low-level operation left to juniors with little or no policy participation whatsoever because it demands top-level involvement. This runs counter to our "traditional" ways. It is also amusing to analyze how "traditional" are our ways. Historically the Muslims in the few hundred years after Hijri popularized the inductive method of empirical science

i.e. of making painstaking, labourious observations of phenomena and then codifying or systematizing the same. In the beginning knowledge developed by other civilizations were translated into Arabic, then came the stage where independent discoveries and new achievements came about in optics, algebra, medicine, geography, zoology, chemistry etc. Very many libraries were set up, even as far away as in Spain where Hakam's library at Cordova boasted 400,000 books or Zuhair, Ibn Abbas' Vizier at Almeria had a similar number excluding pamphlets, and all this in 10th Century !

Slowly and laboriously books in Arabic were translated into Latin and transmitted through Europe sparking off the Renaissance leading to a "rediscovery" of the scientific method which the Muslims had forgotten because they parted company with the spirit of the objective enquiry—which is principally that of measurement. "If ye turn away....my Lord will make another People to succeed you" (X-57). Why should we feel that we have nothing to learn when placed in exalted positions? It is true that "measurement" can be embarrassing because it means exposure. But is exposure a bad thing when we consider that it is only through non-exposure or hoarding of information that it has been possible to hoard wealth or authority or both which created severe distortions in our economy.

METHOD

If we apply the lessons to project evaluation we will find that it necessitates firstly : the acceptance of the scientific method, secondly : defining the existing situation, thirdly : analysis of the same and developing logical ways of proceeding, fourthly : introducing the logical way *i.e.*, taking action and fifthly : creating a sensor to monitor variances caused by internal or external reasons. Then to feed back the variances to the system so as to replot one's course. Naturally, the shorter the time interval between sensing a variation to processing it the easier it is to maintain control because such variances would be kept as small as possible. The administrative apple-cart would not be upset by having to alter its ways and means too much. *Of course just as it is of little use to insist on regulations that run counter to commonsense, it is of less use to attempt to inject techniques for improving efficiency in an organization without preparing the individuals* concerned in an understanding that the system needs change, for change it is. If the explanations are not given in advance, serious misunderstandings must develop later. This, therefore, means project managers must have the administrative or managerial capability to order the large number of completely interrelated elements comprising the plan or the project and this calls for acceptance that the situation is complex and that the more necessary it is to subject problems to systematic treatment. The Systems Approach

suggests ways and means of doing so. Technique fit into this approach. To the extent work-flow (which is related to achieving Objectives) demands, the administrative or management structure must be altered. It must be altered unless the Objective *is* merely maintenance of the structure as an end in itself. Because of vested interests or *inertia* the tendency is always to maintain the status quo. Training, particularly on-the-job of which we have precious little, is the key to creating attitudes conducive towards acceptance of change because an understanding of *why* problems arise leads to the next stage *i.e. how* can we get about solving them. Science and its applied side technology, which has been and is expanding rapidly has also contributed towards complexity for two reasons. The first is that of the awesome accumulation of the written word and the second is that the *sum* of the parts just refuses to add up to the whole. On top of this is the traditional time lag between significant technological and let us not forget social change and the need to accept and adapt them, has become non-existent.

This means our yardsticks must be radically revised in order to evaluate output. As mentioned earlier, training (on-the-job) helps to bring about such realization. The assumption made is that disagreements occur not because people are bound to differ, but because they either lack information or they are misinformed. It is commonly assumed that governmental operations are not amenable to utilizing modern management aids. This is tantamount to saying that they are not amenable to analysis, and this is just not so. Techniques or aids must, therefore, be well and truly grouted in a base arising out of painstaking and laborious analysis. The fact is : techniques have been developed for determining efficiency of operations which do not produce a "profit" at all. Is there after all any harm in travelling to China to educate ourselves?

We may talk of Execution as Tactical Planning *i.e.* efficient use of resources that can be allocated to achieve the objectives. We may talk of Control as Operational Planning wherein we develop control mechanisms. In this case the available data are fixed but the logic of dealing with such data is variable. Or let us look at the accountants terminology of Budgeting, Accounting, Management Accounting, Costing and Auditing; their analogues are more intelligible to the layman as Planning, Execution, Control, Evaluation (short-term emphasis) and Historical (to ensure the ground rules have been followed) respectively. The rupees/paisa figures merely reflect, like a mirror (distorted or otherwise), the future plan or what has happened in the immediate past or even long ago. Of overriding interest is the objectives are no longer necessarily determined by circumstances—where formerly there was mainly a choice of means, there is now also a choice of ends. Is it, therefore, just enough to know the details of applying a particular technique? Is this not attempting to purchase

or import progress/development or the industrial revolution from abroad, uncreating it like a piece of machinery and then setting it into motion? *Putting technology or aids to effective use requires something more than just having knowledge of techniques, equations or formulae.* I am, of course, using the word technology not in the narrow sense that it is commonly associated with here, I am using it in the sense of developing 'know-how' to solve *any* problem that we may be faced with and to arrive at solutions—may not be the ideal but optimal—in our lifetime ! As has been said "most underdeveloped countries want the blessings of the welfare state today, complete with old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, family allowances, health insurance, 40 hours week...." without understanding the discipline *i.e.*, the ordering or systematization that it imposes upon us as individuals.

The world, as we know it, is changing fast. The rate of change in undeveloped countries (such as ours) is greater, though at a lower level of sophistication, then in the developed. We are leap-frogging from the spoken word to the *audio-visual* eliminating in one fell swoop the written. When literacy comes about it will be a matter of looking back from the *audio-visual* to the written word ! It has very pertinently been said that:

> "Any kind of organism, so far as we know, can be closely inbred and nevertheless enjoy lasting success in a stable world....it allows it even guarantees success. But in a changing world it brings disaster' (The Evolution of Man & Society—DARLINGTON).

MODELS

All project work can be reflected as pipeline *model* of flow of information. It is necessary for us to make use of concepts/techniques developed in the main in the last one or two decades for handling information as a commodity and wherever changes, as mentioned earlier, have to be made it must be done. Introduction of modern information technology depends upon the inductive method, it is not, therefore, foreign to our cultural heritage—provided we look back far enough. The discipline or rigour it imposes upon us provides us in exchange predictability in the information handling function of an administrative system. Currently this predictability is missing as is evinced by the lack of control over projects as shown up in time and cost overruns and after a project completion in continuing day-to-day inefficiencies in one form or another. Every organization is an information handling/filtration set-up, for the simple reason that the Number One cannot handle all the data produced at the ground level where the transactions actually occur (if he could, he would need no subordinates), hence condensation must take place, How can one know what one's subordinate or subordinate's subordinate has filtered out or modified when information moves upwards? By definition one does

not know unless the information or communication networks are consciously and deliberately designed in the first instance—something which is hardly ever done. It is this systematization more than anything else that will lead to setting up a process for movement of control information. The process then assumes greater importance than any *single* output or result that it may produce, because it permits of use again and again helping to prevent us from annihilating the very equilibrium we seek to reinforce. A reliable information processing system is somewhat like an equation (a formula or a model) thus

$$a+b=20$$

if a=5, we can quickly deduce that b=15. Working from a base of knowledge improves the quality of one's decisions which makes for improved effectiveness, hence efficiencies. Also to be considered is that any "organized" system there are several levels in the hierarchy. Unfortunately it has not been recognized, much less practised, that the number of levels should coincide with the number of decision-making levels and not be related to a head count of the number of employees, as done in a number of organizations. A definition of the decision-making levels requires precise knowledge of the movement or handling of information within the system being considered. This leads to better control and when control is defined, evaluation follows as the night the day.

Application of the concepts that I have tried to develop in this short talk make Planning, Execution & Control part of a unified pipeline network. This means a good planning mechanism obviates the need for setting up independent execution or control systems because the same would have been integrated into the plan formulation in the first instance.