

PERFORMANCE IMPEDIMENTS IN GOVERNMENT: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

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The article presents the various performance impediments such as: job security; faulty staffing practices; poor motivation; role ambiguity; over centralisation; multiple agencies; unprofessional management practices; red tapism and multiple window system; reluctance to dispose off old cases; trade unionism; delays, negativism, corruption, unresponsiveness and unaccountability and politicisation of administration faced by 150 senior and middle level administrators in their work environment. The management strategies have also been suggested.

INSTRUCTION

The author has made an effort and ventured to convey the deeply felt performance impediments by administrators in their work environment. The article illustrates much extensively debated but less documented major performance problems bedeviling the Centre and State governments and suggests certain broad strategies from Human Resource Management perspective. It is based on the data provided by one hundred and fifty (150) middle and senior officials from Center and State governments who participated in twelve (12) Executive Development Programmes conducted by the author in Indian Institute of Public Administration in the area of Behavioural Sciences during 1996-98. An attempt is being made to report the synoptic notes of the group work presented in the training programmes by the participants.

TOPICAL PROBLEMS

Topical problems are as follows:

1. Job Security

Security need being basic in human personality plays a pivotal role in sustaining the level of motivation especially in Indian situation. This feeling appears to be gradually disappearing. On the contrary, the job security is perceived as one of the predominant performance impediment by both senior and middle level officers. The social thinkers opinion that job security for government servants will ensure independent thinking and decision making no more holds good. Ironically the government servants are found to dislike to the extent of abuse, this privilege and attribute many behavioural problems in organizations such as: late coming; indiscipline; playing truant during office hours; defying lawful authority and at

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times performing no work for days to 'too much' of job-security in government. This opinion has formed across length and breadth of country especially in Eastern and Northern India.

Management Strategy

The too much of job security requires appropriate pruning at all levels.

2. Faulty Staffing Practices

Both 'over staffing' and understaffing have been reported as common problems facing government offices. Lack of manpower planning is featuring as a key issue in reducing productivity. For example, Police Stations/Units are understaffed, lack adequately qualified hands, sometimes irregular recruitment and also suffer from utter-mismanagement of cadres. Similarly, the fact cannot be overlooked that government departments are getting top heavy with ridiculous hierarchies in some departments. For example, Conservator of Forests, Chief Conservator of Forest and like. This top heavy and even proliferating bureaucracy is expanding without rhyme or reasons apparently on the basis of political and extraneous considerations just to accommodate powerful lobbies. The recruitment policy and promotional prospects are largely dependent on the ideology "Tell me the person, I will tell you the rule". Absence of scientifically evolved 'Human Resource Information System' for deployment of proper personnel and unplanned transfer of government servants from top to bottom have become breeding grounds and genesis of vicious circle of corruption.

Management Strategies

- ◆ Installation of effective 'manpower' planning practices

- ◆ Need for computerized 'Human Resource Management Information System' at all levels.
- ◆ An appropriate recruitment policy
- ◆ Transfer policy where there is least political interference and most needed security of reasonable tenure to each personnel.

3. Poor Motivation

This top heavy organization structures, both at Centre and State level, is perceived as one of the important factor for poor motivation of employee at lower and middle levels. It has been reported that rewards for excelling in performance is absent. Top brass is rarely found interested in boosting employee morale through personal touch or by sorting out irregularities of staffing and manpower planning. This problem is further compounded by lack of regular assessment of staff capabilities. Allocation of jobs are rarely done on the basis of technical competencies and job requirements and at times placement amounts to posting 'square pegs in round holes'.

Management Strategies

- ◆ Regular skill assessment of employees at all levels.
- ◆ Appropriate allocation of jobs
- ◆ Training for developing motivational skills at all levels.

4. Role Ambiguity

Ambiguity in roles and responsibilities at all levels is another performance impediment in government resulting in poor employee motivation. The absence of clear demarcation of Role boundaries and responsibilities most of the time results in either not achieving the

results or duplication of task causing avoidable delays, unaccountability of public expenditure and tardy implementation of government schemes.

Management Strategies

To make the civil servants accountable and responsive to current needs it is imperative that:

- ◆ Roles and responsibilities should be categorically delineated so that specific job specification ensure fool proof accountability and responsiveness in the administration at all levels.

5. Over centralization

The positional authority providing executive powers to carry out the task to achieve desired results appears to be overcentrated in some remote authority resulting in lack of executive powers to the grassroot functionaries despite the onset of 73rd and 74th Amendments by decentralizing power. Another peculiar phenomenon which more often demoralize the senior officers heading the Directorates is 'lack of power even for trivial matters, whereas sanctioning authority for the same matter in the Secretariat turns out more often than not to be a very junior functionary like Assistant/Deputy Secretary'.

Management Strategy

- ◆ Adequate 'Executive powers' should be vested at all levels.

6. Multiple Agencies

The massive Rural Development Programmes such as: Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP); Poverty Alleviation Programmes; Watershed Development Programmes have been implemented nation-wide by the government. Multiple government agencies are

implementing simultaneously almost similar programmes having similar objectives with little differences but with different guidelines, procedures for implementation and reporting mechanism. For example, various Poverty Alleviation programmes, such as Ganga Kalyan Yojna, Housing etc. are implemented by various State undertakings, Cooperative Agencies and State Government departments. The departmental functions are tackled at State sector level in the districts and at district level and peripheral levels simultaneously. This sectoral approach has led to overlapping the very same duties and responsibilities at the cost of duplicating bogus records and the like resulting in lack of coordination and wastage of resources and confusion for implementators as well as beneficiaries.

Management Strategies

- Streamlining all the government Rural Development programmes having subtle differences and catering to specific target groups.
- Scientific allocation of functions, roles, responsibilities at State government department level, District level, Block level and Village level elected bodies.
- Greater coordination among various agencies.
- Uniform reporting mechanism to avoid confusion.

8. Unprofessional Management Practices

Bureaucratic system breeds unprofessional management practices. The concept of time and motion study, in respect of 'office layout', smooth command structure (for example getting orders from two superiors resulting in poor output and interpersonal conflict) and lack of system of 'feedback

from below' and the like are given go by in most government offices resulting in waste of man-hours and related problems.

Management Strategies

- Creating office layout on the basis of 'time and motion' study
- Restructuring of organization structure wherever needed.
- Creating a system of formal feedback from below to upwards.

9. Red-tapism and Multiple Window system

An inevitable offshoot of above mentioned insensate bureaucratic system is 'Red Tapism' and Multiple Window system of handling even internal matters in government offices. For example, a simple paper moving back and forth through the several hands.

Management Strategies

- Scientific streamlining the system of processing the internal and external matters to the extent of modifying the existing proformas.

10. Reluctance to disperse the Old Cases

Government employees at lower level are found to be reluctant to clear the old cases. This innate resistance coupled with 'play truant' practices and neglect of work during office hours has compounded the problem for senior officers in government.

Management Strategies

- Putting deadline for disposal of old cases and enforcement of punishment in case of failure.

11. Trade Unionism

Union militancy and irresponsible trade unionism have done and continue to do

immense damage to work environment in government offices. This, in turn, has a cascading effect and erodes office discipline. In such an unhealthy ambience office managers find it difficult to enforce discipline and get work done by the government. This problem initiated lot of debate in all the training programmes but the participants could not arrive at any management strategy which could be enforced from the government side. Hence, no management strategy has been suggested.

12. Delays, Negativism, Corruption, Unresponsiveness and Unaccountability

The red tapism, cynicism, negative approach, rampant corruption everywhere and total irresponsiveness and unaccountability have eaten away the vitals of administration. The common men, the targeted groups have become desperate and feel sick of government administration.

Management Strategies

- Simplification of procedures at all levels.
- Building administrative accountability through enforceable legislation.
- The transparency and right to information by amending official 'Secrets Act' so that everything done at all levels except of course 'defence' and the like should be made known, publicised and available to the common man.
- 'Social audit' is visualized as a potent weapon to monitor and expose the irregularities, misappropriations and misuse of authority etc. through 'vigilance committees' at all levels and 'Ombudsman' for grievance redressal.
- These bodies and also certain accredited NGOs could be constituted by the

government at various levels comprising of persons known for their integrity, honesty and transparency in their public life. These instruments should have enough powers to speedily enquire into and ensure quick disciplinary and correctional actions to rebuild government image.

- The documentation of work schedule, the publicity of budgetary provisions and the work details at prominent places should act as deterrents against corrupt forces at all levels.

13. Politicization of Administration

The common scene is that the legislative hands are devouring the executive portals and even the common administrative decisions or major executive policy decisions. The politicians have carved out for themselves an unpleasant role of arm twisting the administration through means both fair and foul. The transfers at all levels, based on favoritism, nepotism and corruption have become the order of the day. The bureaucracy has lost its potency and is a helpless, dumb spectator.

Management Strategies

- A model code of conduct for the elected representatives from legislators of Central and State Government

down to Gram Panchayat members is a must. This alone can bring some discipline so that the political interference in unwarranted arenas could be eliminated.

- The policy decisions and management of personnel, delivering responsive administration should have to be properly demarcated.

14. The Answerability to Manifesto

The political parties promising recklessly and deceiving the gullible electorate at the hustings and going scot-free thereafter have created a situation of distrust and cynicism which is affecting the very integrity and credibility of the country. Apart from invoking potent weapons of direct democracy, viz. referendum, plebiscite and 'recall the public awareness' have to be created so as to create an atmosphere of accountability and commitment.

The author is of opinion that the performance problems listed above can not be fully eradicated but sincere attempts by all can definitely minimise them to a great extent. The management strategies suggested above, if applied would certainly enhance the effectiveness of administration in the Governments.