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MOVEMENTS OF PERSONNEL^{1/}

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inexperienced young men are likely to be catapulted into positions of responsibility within a few years of obtaining their basic qualifications. Apart from the danger of lack of maturity resulting in mismanagement and a lot of errors, there is also the problem which is being experienced at present by a number of developing countries, that because the top posts are held by young men, hierarchical mobility comes almost to a standstill with the resultant frustration and weakening of morale in the lower ranks especially in cases where the retirement age has also been raised.

Then also the only way to break up over-centralization, is to decentralize. This may be a drastic surgical operation, but one is left with virtually no alternative. But decentralization has its problems as well. There are the problems of getting the right persons to move to regional offices where their services would be most beneficial. This problem is compounded as mentioned earlier on, by lack of amenities such as proper housing accommodation, good drinking water, electricity etc., in the regions. In other words, there is lack of real incentives and this includes monetary incentives as well. Then also there is the question of whether by decentralizing a country may not be dissipating the scarce trained manpower at its disposal and thereby neutralizing their impact on the development of the country. It may possibly be argued that where the numbers are really small, then centralization may be the answer.

This lack of basic amenities in certain parts of the developing countries has earned for these parts unsavoury reputations. People attach certain connotations to particular regions, and a posting to any such region may be regarded as a punishment. Such a view can even be so powerful that some officers are prepared to resign their appointments rather than move to any of the "bad" regions.

Apart from these connotations, there is also the problem of the family structure in developing countries. An officer who has a reasonably comfortable accommodation in the capital, and has settled down reasonably well with his children (who may be attending school) and other dependants is more likely than not, to decide not to move an inch from the capital. This is normally because of the difficulty of finding suitable accommodation in the new station as well as finding suitable schools for his children.

All these problems boil down to the question of whether or not there is some mobility in the developing countries, and if so what types of mobility are important in these countries.

Most of us tend to conceive mobility in terms of geographical mobility - moving from place to place. Especially important for this discussion is the relationship of geographical mobility to certain personal characteristics. The general consensus appears to be that the young move more readily than the old; that the highly educated move more than the uneducated who are traditionally stuck to their villages, that those from high status occupations move more than those from lower and that homeowners are less likely to move than renters. In short, that it is the younger, well-educated and highly-skilled personnel who are most likely

to leave an area first. Thus in terms of the kinds of talent most needed for the maintenance of a flourishing modern community, the present trend resulting from geographical mobility is that the rich areas get richer and the poor areas poorer. This is because the tendency is for people to desert, as it were, the undeveloped poor area for the highly developed industrial towns. This is especially true where there is too much centralization of decision-making power and of economic development.

So far we have been discussing geographical mobility as resulting from the personal choice or wish of individuals concerned. But geographical mobility can also be imposed by one's employers. One of the most famous and oft-quoted rules of most civil services in Africa is that an acceptance of a civil service job implies that the individual is prepared to work anywhere within the country or outside, where his services are most needed. Thus the officer is posted from place to place. While this may be a good way of training and upgrading the individual concerned, if it is too frequent, the individual becomes a rolling stone gathering no moss and making no impact at any of the stations to which he is posted. In a subsequent paragraph we shall discuss the problems which are normally created by postings.

Lateral Mobility/Inter-Departmental Transfers

Transfer as the term is used here refers to the movement of persons into and out of various major occupational groupings. For instance, if an administrative officer in the home service becomes a diplomat in the foreign service or if an Educational Officer becomes a social welfare officer then we refer to this as a transfer. Normally, the individual officer moves into a new job with a different title but does not lose or gain in salary. He normally, however, loses in seniority - vis-à-vis his colleagues in his new job. This is a means to check over-ambitious and unscrupulous careerists.

Hierarchical Mobility/Intra-Departmental Movement

Here we are concerned with movements up and down in a particular organization. This is probably the form of movement of most interest to employers and employees alike. By definition, a career service is intended to offer a life-time vocation to capable people as well as opportunities for growth, development and advancement. Opportunity to rise breeds optimism and is central to the difference between hope and despair. The purpose of a fair promotion system is to make this possible while at the same time ensuring a supply of manpower from which selections can be made to fill the higher posts of the service.

The career concept, however, suggests an acceptance of the value of remaining, during most of one's occupational life-time within the confines of a single organization. On the other hand, lateral entry i.e., inter-institutional mobility may be as valid for many persons as the career concept but there is at present no satisfactory answer as to which is better as a pattern of movement. All that one hears when

the subject of mobility is raised among people in authority is that there should be some movement, but not too much.

The other side of this hierarchical movement is that of demotion though the incidence of this type of movement is quite low. Demotion refers to a change in status of an employee to a post with less responsible duties and less pay. This may be resorted to when a reduction in staff is necessary the assumption being that employees who have performed duties in the higher levels of an occupational hierarchy are better equipped to perform the lower duties than are those employees whose entire experience has been at a lower level. It is however important that this type of policy should take account of occupational and individual differences since the assumption is not generally applicable.

Demotion, however, is normally used as a disciplinary measure especially in organizations set up on a military basis. It seems however, hardly likely that an employee who is demoted for inefficiency, insubordination or other reasonable cause will normally make a satisfactory employee at a lower level since the penalty is too severe to have a wholesome effect on the worker. Demotion could, however, be used to retain the advisory services of older employees before their final retirement. Keeping older employees in jobs beyond their real usefulness results in frustration among the young but the advice of elder administrators should be as valuable as that of elder statesmen. The business world obtains their advice by making the executive director or president, a member of the board of directors. If this type of policy is to be acceptable, then the pay of such persons should, if not be the same, only be slightly reduced especially where pension is based on pay at the end of the service.

Barriers to Mobility

Each of these forms of movement has its own problems which more or less act as barriers to mobility.

(i) Promotions: For instance, as we have seen a rigid reliance on or acceptance of the career concept implies that movement will be within a single organization and in most cases these movements may be only two or three, at most four. As we are concerned not with mobility as an end in itself but as a means of securing the best man for the job, the question is what promotion policy should we adopt? This may be broken into two sub-questions:

- (a) How high in the ladder of hierarchy of posts should a career officer hope to rise?
- (b) At what point in this ladder should lateral entry be permitted, and under what conditions? Here lateral entry refers to the bringing in of candidates either from outside the service or from other ministries or departments at other than the entering grades of the particular personnel system.

Before attempting to answer these sub-questions it is necessary to emphasize that promotion should not be regarded as a right but as an opportunity and should, therefore, be earned by exacting competition. In the early stages of a career system in a newly independent and developing country, it may be necessary to make concessions as talent is normally in short supply. Having said this, and accepting the advantages of placing the summit of the career service at the highest level possible, it would seem that there is a lot to be said for refining the career concept to accommodate lateral entry in some suitable proportion. This would seem to be dictated by the scarcity of trained and skilled manpower as competition is not a full answer to any problem of scarcity. In cases of scarcity, the answer usually lies in complimentary efforts to increase the supply or in some form of sharing. Moreover, the changes in the requirements for leadership and new knowledge about preparation and training for leadership are making it increasingly possible, even advisable, for organizations to give some major appointments to men from other enterprises or fields so as to have the advantage of the richness and colour of their lives. After all, as John Gardener puts it, people are the ultimate source of renewal of talent. Merely promoting the officer in the department because he happens to be there and is the most senior and performs his job averagely well is not likely to meet the need of a developing country.

But a number of factors act as barriers to lateral entry. First of all, the prestige of the civil service in the eyes of would-be entrants in the private sector and the educational institutions could act as a barrier. Then, there is the timing problem. A job may not be looking for a man when he is looking for it. Then also there may be a failure of skills to mesh as well as hesitancy in changing jobs or careers. Money and civil service conditions may also be disincentive for businessmen wanting to join the service. Apart from these external restrictions on mobility, there is also an internal resistance to bringing people in from the outside. This is true of every organization if the entry is at a grade higher than the bottom. The underlying problems are not only the mechanical ones of regulations and rules but attitudinal since we normally feel threatened when someone is brought in at an equal or superior level and the force of our reactions may stay the hand of our boss in doing such a thing. Furthermore the government official tends to look for an absolute match of qualifications and experience, instead of being aware that the job is likely to change over the next few years and it is the person in whom he should be interested not just a bundle of technical abilities. It is in any case easier to promote the next man than to recruit a fresh man.

(ii) Transfers or horizontal mobility

As mentioned already, while one might not lose any salary in changing one's job for another in a different department (inter-departmental transfer) one does lose in seniority. The officer who transfers takes his seniority in the new department from the date of assumption of duty

in that department. He is therefore, likely to be junior to everybody in that particular grade. While there are good reasons for this policy, it acts as a barrier to mobility. So also does the reluctance of heads of departments to lose good people. The usual reaction is, "if this man leaves the whole unit/division is going to collapse". All sorts of subterfuges and promises are, therefore, used to block his exit. But if the man should decide to leave by all means, the organization continues to function normally and his absence is soon forgotten.

(iii) Geographical mobility

As we have seen a judicious rotation of officers is a good method of training but postings can create a lot of difficulties especially for those who have family (wife and children). Apart from breaking ties with friends and acquaintances the officer moves into a new station and then has the problem of having to look for suitable accommodation as well as schools for his children etc. Though it is rare in Africa there are instances of people refusing promotion if it means changing their stations.

In unitary States in Africa, there is usually too much centralization and if a person takes on his first job in the country's capital, the chances of his getting a better or even a comparable job outside this city are normally slim. In federal States, there usually are certain requirements such as residential, which may act as a check on mobility between the various regions of the States.

(iv) Pensions/Rewards

The pensions policy of most African governments serve to impede mobility. The strength of a person's commitment to an organization is normally influenced by the rewards he receives from the system and the kinds of experiences he has to undergo in order to receive the rewards. The expectation of reward operates in the same way, and the strength of commitment should be related to the strength of conviction that one will be rewarded by the organization. Consequently, the retirement systems, by not making any provision for vesting the benefits in the employee act as a deterrent to mobility. After working for more than fifteen years, the officer naturally becomes very reluctant to change to outside jobs if this means that the retirement benefits that he may have accrued over the years are going to be forfeited. Security in old age is something which every official who has given faithful service counts on.

Suggestions for breaking down the barriers

In the light of the background discussion above, what policies should be formulated which might serve as a positive approach to the movement of personnel, having accepted that increased mobility of employees within government should promote greater utilization of existing skills and experience to the advantage of all?

First and foremost, there should be a total manpower policy which must have a base in economic and fiscal policy. In other words, governments in African countries should after deciding on the scope of their economic development bearing in mind their fiscal ability, make a deliberate attempt to plan the development of their manpower. There should be a general and co-ordinated effort to provide for both employers and potential employees; the labour force information necessary for all to function in an optimum way. There should also be a mechanism for disseminating job information i.e., for providing information about jobs actually open and waiting and about qualified people looking for jobs. A programme for assistance of potential employees in moving should be adopted. Most civil services at present, pay some sort of severance allowance but the Swedish example of stimulating geographical mobility by special travel and transfer grants as well as family allowance for workers with double house-keeping costs due to shortage of housing, needs to be emulated.

Every effort should also be made to give training and other forms of education for the upgrading of personnel since a major source of supply for any organization is within its own manpower pool. Governments must also strengthen such devices for increasing the supply of skilled manpower as general education, technical education and the like.

Residential requirements in federal States have to be reviewed as this kind of barrier to mobility could also lead to inefficiency. Though in affluent societies like the USA it is said (by Harold Rubin) that pensions pose no obstacles for the movement of professional and scientific personnel, this statement cannot hold in respect of others (even in the US) less fortunate in job offers. It certainly does not hold in Africa. Pension rights should, therefore, be vested in the employee. This can more easily be done if we forego the "non-contributory" pension schemes and adopt the contributory systems. Any hardship which may be caused by this change over may be minimal as we do contribute indirectly in the so-called non-contributory pension schemes, by accepting lower salaries.

If the best use is to be made of the scarce trained manpower then it will be necessary to detail personnel from central government to public corporation and local governments without loss of benefits or status. This will ensure that these organizations which may not be attractive by themselves can have hopes of being run properly by qualified people.

Conclusion

It would seem, however, that the heart of the solution does not lie with changed and updated systems, for systems do not manage; men manage. Thus the answer lies in the willingness of government officers to manage. Over-centralization and lack of incentives have resulted in most cases in turning government offices into post offices - lacking in decision-making ability. The top man should see that the selection of personnel is one of his major administrative functions and should understand the relationship between the success of his programme and the people who are in charge of it. For, after all, it is people who make policies work. Consequently, the top administrator who concentrates on making good policies but does not see that the right people are recruited to implement the policies is not fulfilling his mission.