A Study of Administrative Reform as Redress of Citizen's Grievances

S. Sahayaseelan

The discussion on institutional devices to deal with redress of citizens' grievances forms part of a larger issue in public administration—administrative reform. The meaning and nature of administrative reform is to be clarified first. Secondly, reform efforts have to be related to the surrounding conditions that generate or suppress demands for reform. Thirdly, reform strategies differ from situation to situation and aim at solving different kinds of administrative problems. The different types of reforms have therefore to be identified, and the reform process needs to be explained. Fourthly, implementation poses problems perhaps more serious than recommendation. These issues involved in the implementation of reform proposals deserve careful consideration.

Implication of Reform

Administration being constantly involved in practical action situations cannot afford to remain static. It has necessarily to change for the sake of sheer survival. Four principal goals of reorganisation identified by Mosher are : changing policy and programmes, improving administrative effectiveness, solving personnel problems, and countering pressures and threats from outside organisation. Of these, improving organisational effectiveness seems a more generic objective.[1] Paul Appleby in an insightful article on the first Hoover Commission Report in the U.S.A. suggested two basic types of changes in administration constant and episodic.[2] The first type stands for incremental change that takes place in course of spontaneous adjustments to changing situations. New filling system, alterations in procedures of work. reshuffling of postings are examples of this type. Episodic change is called 'reorganization' by Appleby. It is much more wide - ranging in scope and content involving a major shake-up in government.

Administrative reform has this episodic character, Gerald Caiden[3] defines it as "the artificial inducement of administrative transformation, against resistance". Three interrelate properties reform are moral purpose, artificial transformation and resistance. A reform proposal is aimed at improving the status quo; it marks a departure from existing set-up; and opposition to the proposal is assumed. Caiden makes a distinction between *reform* and *change*. The latter is a self - adjusting organisational response to changing conditions, while reform becomes necessary to remedy the malfunctioning of the natural administrative processes.

Aministrative development needs to be distinguished from administrative reform. As Fred Riggs[4] has defined it, administrative development is concerned with the growing capacity of administrative systems to make choices and exercise discretion to bring about changes in the environment by deliberate and conscious decisions.

Administrative reform can be considered as a process[5] in the sequential sense. The circumstances in which the demands for reform are articulated, the need for such reform as acknowledged by the reformers, the methods adopted to frame and examine reform proposals, and their acceptance and implementation form discrete phases of a continuous process.

Conditions of Reform

Administrative reform is aimed at changing what exists. It is thus related to the existing administrative set-up. Secondly, many interests and groups get involved in the reform process. Proposals for reform have naturally to weather opposition and conflicting views, as there are 'vested interests' in the maintenance of *status quo.* What looks good (reform) to some is considered bad by others. Thirdly' administrative reform forms part of a larger political process and should be considered in relation to it. Reform proposals are often conceived in narrow, mechanical terms. This is What Montgomery[6] has characterised as "adapting static model of administrative perfection to dynamic political reality". Administration as a machine is sought to be differentiated from its political ecology. Norton Long's warning in this connection is very relevant as he observes that attempts to solve administrative problems in isolation from the structure of power and purpose in the polity are bound to be illusory.[7] Fourthly, a related issue is the status of the bureaucracy in a country where reform proposals are

being considered. In this connection a distinction has to be made between instrumental bureaucracies and institutional bureaucracies. In the Weberian sense, instrumental bureaucracies are 'instruments' in the hands of the political masters. Once the political leaders frame reform proposals, the governmental agencies are expected to accept and implement them. Institutional bureaucracies, on the other band, are not dispensable tools or instruments. They might have been created for instrumental purposes, but in course of time they transcend this role and develop an expressive or value significance for both their own members and the community at large.[8] The ex-colonial countries like Sri Lanka have inherited institutional bureaucracies with a fairly autonomous character that developed under conditions of administrative hegemony.[9] During the colonial period, the bureaucracy was the master and it ruled virtually unchecked by political overseers. Montgomery has explained the problems of administrative reform under conditions of bureaucratic hegemony thus:[10]

Bureaucracies are not easily mobilised by external forces. Even when the public does make its demands known, the bureaucracy may lack the empathy necessary to develop a sense of urgency in its response. In most underdeveloped countries, both sides of the demand-response formula are weak; public possesses scanty resources for expressing its interests, and the bureaucracy has little sympathy for the conditions under which most citizens live. The forces that compel or induce bureaucracies to follow a desired rationale in these circumstances are much more complicated than the legal relationships, the prestigious hierarchies, and the popular demands that have supported reforms in autocracies or Western democracies. Because of the greater difficulty of using reform as a means of changing bureaucratic behaviour in the newly independent countries, a wider range of sanctions, and especially those invoking the participation of competing subsystems, is called for.

In the developing countries, administrative reform is badly needed; yet it faces almost insuperable difficulties. The institutional bureaucracies are deeply entrenched in the political systems of these countries. They claim superiority over the political executive and try to 'buy off political leaders and defy public pressures'. They dominate the forums where reform proposals are discussed, and the proposals are processed by them. Reforming institutional bureaucracies is therefore more a political issue than a purely managerial one. "The key to the reform of institutional bureaucracies ...

would appear to be the questioning of the legitimacy of the institution, and thereby, its autonomy and self-direction, by placing it, along with its values and practices, under the spotlight of public scrutiny".[11]

Acceptance of the real supremacy of the political executive, independent audit of bureaucratic functioning, and closer citizens' supervision are necessary to reduce the autonomy and strength of the institutional bureaucracy. To the extent secrecy in government will be removed and open government promoted, this will lead to the gradual weakening of the institutional bureaucracy and its steady transformation into an instrumentalist role. In other words, administrative reform, to he actually realised, needs political will and political direction. So long as the culture of the colonial bureaucracy lingers on and the top bureaucracy remains entrenched in political positions, genuine reform is unlikely to be proposed and pursued. At any rate, taking the top bureaucracy alone is an important precondition of reform.

Types of Reform

Reform proposals vary in their sweep and depth. Their significance also varies depending as what aspects of administration become the target of change. Some proposals may attract the attention of the press and the public. There are usually many others that rarely create any commotion. One way of classifying the reform proposals is to refer to the extent of administrative space affected by them. A proposal may have far-reaching consequences for the administration as a whole or for a large segment of it. It may have entire administration-wide significance. By contrast, another proposal may be directed toward one specific aspect or a single department and would thus be of much narrower scope. For instance, creation of vigilance cells in every ministry or the setting up of the Department of Administrative Reforms at the Centre in 1964 falls in the first group; while creation of the Steel Authority of India (SAIL) or the proposal to split of the Life Insurance Corporation of India for more decentralized decision making falls in the second.

Another way of classifying the reform proposals is to refer to their substantive contents. If the first classificatory scheme is concerned with 'how much' of administration is being affected, the second is concerned with 'what' is being affected. Substantively, administrative organizations are composed of three interrelated elements;

structure, process and behaviour. Administrative reform is often directed toward these three elements either separately or jointly.

Structural reform is very common in public administration. The basic concern here is with division of work, delegation and decentralization, creation of autonomous agencies, and setting up of coordination mechanisms to harmonise the actions of interdependent units. Most reform proposals concentrate on these themes.

Procedural reform is also frequently suggested and pursued in government organizations.. This may involve changes in financial rules, alteration of work procedures (e.g. changes in filing methods forms etc.), and general attempts to avoid red tape. Much of the work done by the Staff Inspection Unit in the Union Ministry of Finance would fall in this category. Application of a battery of management techniques to different administrative situations also belongs to this class of reform. PPBS. operations research, systems analysis etc. are now widely used in public administration. New technologies like the computer and data—processing machines are being used now-a-days to facilitate better and quicker operations in government. Introduction of these techniques does not of course mean their real acceptance. Techniques and machines or are in many public organisations remain mere show pieces or are not genuinely internalised by the employees. Automation has special problems in terms of changing interpersonal relations and role displacement.

Behavioural reform is a relatively new thing so far as government organisations are concerned. Bureaucracy has often been criticised for its impersonal character and dehurnanising consequences. Behavioural changes have therefore been suggested to improve interpersonal and intergroup relationships within the bureaucracy. Also such changes arc advocated to make the administration serve the public better. Participative management and sensitivity training have gained wide currency in recent times in public administration. The former is aimed at creating an atmosphere of togetherness by offering opportunities of participation to different grades of employees. Sensitivity training is directly oriented toward attitudinal change and has now become quite fashionable in government training institutions. It remains however a debatable question how far behavioural changes can be really produced by one-shot and individual-centred training programmes.

Special importance is attached to organisation development or OD as a technique

to bring about planned organisational change. Originally started in business organisations OD programmes are being tried out in public organisations also. Conceived basically as an ongoing educational process, OD aims at optimum utilization of human resources for organisadonal renewal by laying emphasis on interpersonal processes rather than on structure, procedure, or technology. Major emphasis in OD is on team – building, communication and collaborative problem – solving.

Organisation development programmes have made use of applied behavioural science. Their application to public administration poses some genuine difficulties. As Golembiewski points out, government orgnisations have special features like openness to many kinds of influences, greater variety of interests, reward structures and values at subgroup levels, absence of a clear-cut management group, and weak linkages between executives and operating managers. Also, the 'habit background' of public agencies is unique. Reluctance to delegate, legalism, emphasis on security, sturess on caution and procedure, and less strongly developed concept of professional management deserve special mention in this context. OD programmes have to face these challenges and constraints in public administration.[12]

The different types of reforms, as described above, are usually considered separately. Structural reform may ignore behavioural implications and procedural changes are often suggested without examining their wider importance for the organisation as a whole. The full benefits of reform are thus rarely reaped in the absence of a coherent reform perspective.

Process of Reform

Administrative reform is never an one-shot job. A progressive government interested in maintaining a certain standard of performance has to continually adjust its administrative machinery to the various kinds of changes in the society. When performance standards are to be improved, reform becomes much more important. The Government of India has set up as many as eighteen committees[13] and commissions to enquire into one or more segments of public administration. The Administrative Reforms Commission (1966—70) was set up with most comprehensive terms of reference embracing almost the entirety of public administration in India. The Railway Reforms Committee, set up later (May, 1981), is to suggest measures

for improving the capability of the railways to handle higher volume of traffic in the coming decades. The committee's work is related to the organisation and working of only one public agency, and it has mainly to make projective recommendations.

These examples clearly indicate that reform, either comprehensive or sectoral, is a deliberate effort. It is initiated at a particular point of time, discussed at length and carefully formulated for wider dissemination. The reform proposals are then finalized and internalised by relevent organisations for actual implementation. What happens at the time of implementation need to be monitored so that the reform proposals could be suitably adjusted to fit the real-life situation.

Thus conceived, administrative reform is a process that can be broken down into discrete phases from the perception of problems to the implementation of reform proposals to solve those problems. One way of describing the process is to follow Herbert Simon's model of decision-making. The three stages in Simon's formulation— search, design and 'choice—apply equally well to the reform process. The search stage refers to the appreciation of the need for administrative change. At the design phase, the different alternatives to cope with change are considered along with their probable benefits and costs. The choice phase is concerned with the selection of one alternative for practical application.

A very similar process-model has been suggested by Caiden.[14] It is much more elaborate and analytical. Caiden's model includes four distinct phases.

   (a) awareness of need for administrative change,
   (b) formulation of goals and objectives, strategy and tactics,
   (c) implementation of reform, and
   (d) evaluation of reform in terms of the reformer's objectives.

Effective *awareness of need* for change starts when problems are aired and proposals to solve these suggested. Administrative the reform becomes necessary when the administration

   (a) is unable to cope with rising demands coming from clients;
   (b) is unable to anticipate future demands that are likely to be put on it;
   (c) is lacking in effective methods to cope with it~ ongoing and projective activities.

Usually, awareness of change is blocked by a number of factors. Tolerance of maladministration may be high in a particular society. The top management may be in favour of *status quo.* So, reform ideas will not be entertained and are likely to be nipped in the bud. There may be resource constraints and the organisation may not be prepared to invest extra funds for reform. To talk of reform is to deviate from the current state of affairs.. Formal organisations tend to socialise individuals into conformist roles. Reform proposals are therefore unconventional. The initiator of reform has to face criticism and even punishment. A reformer is some kind of a rebel who must have the courage and confidence to stand up to the pressures of conformism, social ostracization and organisatmonal intimidation. Administrative knowledge and skill, a sense of politics) and a moral commitment to reform are essential pre-requisites. Hence, as Caiden observes, "reform is the work of a minority"[15].

Reform proposals find easy acceptance in situations of uncertainty, disorganization and dislocation. Ideological commitment to change also facilitates administrative reform. There must be status quo-upsetting socio-economic and political circumstances like regime change, economic crisis, rapid urbanization, proverty and rising crime rate, winch would impel changes in administration to cope with the unusual situations.

The second stage is concerned with proper *diagnosis and remedial action.* Once a problem has been identified (e.g. low productivity, high turnover of personnel etc.), one has to go deep into its causes and formulate concrete suggestions for remedial action. Both 'relevant knowledge and creative thought' are necessary to propose workable remedies. Goals and objectives of reform are to be clearly stated, and strategy and tactics to push through reform in the face of opposition and suspicion worked out.

Reform proposals can be incremental or comprehensive imitative or creative. Generally, incremental changes are suggested for practical reasons of acceptability and quick implementation. Similarly, imitation is much easier than innovation. The proposal for reform gives reference to other countries, organizations or situations where a specific method is said to have worked well. This is so very convincing an argument. Innovation would have raised many questions and doubts.

Formulation of reform proposals includes diagnosis of the root causes of maladministration, drafting of feasible proposals, convincing people about their

soundness, confronting opposition and keeping some provision of an escape route in case of failure. Complex and sweeping proposals are looked with suspicion and need more time for acceptance and implementation. Usually reform proposals ate judged critically at the initial stages, when these are to be explained clearly to dispel doubts and win support. Acceptance of reforms is more likely (a) "if they are tailored to local circumstances, implemented through existing institutions, and invite local participation; (b) if existing institutions are not condemned out of hand, that is if attention is given to extolling the virtues of reform rather than the defects of the unreformed; and if they arc based on critical rather than uncritical nonoperationalism."[16]

The reformer has to enlarge his area of support. His strategy would therefore be "to win over vested interests, Opponents, and neutrals if possible while strengthening support."[17] Reforms may preferably he on the basis of a longterm plan and by several stages. 'There can be a built-in experimentalism within the reform plan so that if things go wrong at any stage, the plan should be flexiblc enough to permit necessary adjustments in the light of experience. The role of leadership in pushing through reform hardly needs any emphasis. Those who propose referms must have a large following and should be holding important positions in the organisations concerned. Their personalities in terms of leadership qualities and general acceptability help in popularising the reform proposals.

Implementation of Reform

While analysing implementation of reforms Caiden refers to four methods of implementation :[18]

(a)   reforms imposed through political revolution,

(b)   reforms introduced to remedy organisational rigidity,

(c)   reforms through the legal system, and

(d)   reforms through changes in attitude.

Administration is shaped and influenced by political forces. When one political regime is replaced by another, the change is bound to affect the structure and working of public administration. This happens even in times of peaceful political changes in the course of normal democratic governance. A revolutionary change like colonialism

giving place to constitutional democracy or a sudden coup signifies a radical transformation of the power elite through shifts in the power base. Sweeping administrative reforms are likely to follow such radical political changes.

In normal times it is the bureaucracy that feels the need for minor administrative changes. Strains and stresses are detected in its operation, and excessive rigidity in structure and regulations is sought to be removed. Almost as a kind of defence mechanism, impulses for reform come from within the bureaucracy. The changes take place in several forms such as personnel reshuffling, research, promotion, alteration of structures and regulations, encouragement of innovation and initiative and better public relations.

Administrative reform through changes in the legal system is a very common phenomenon. A new law on land refrms or local government can usher in very significant changes in administration. At the time of framing the law and in course of legislative debates and discussions, the proposed reforms receive wide publicity. The :age of legislation is usual K preceded by consultations and deliberations in several forums such as committees or commissions, the press and so on.

Reform through attitudinal changes involves manipulation of the human side of enterprise. Administrative organisations consist essentially of human beings. Formal changes in structures, laws and regulations may not produce the desired results unless these changes are appreciated and accepted by the organisational members. To quote Caiden, "Lasting reforms cannot depend on the superiority of power or the coercion of nonbelievers. Ultimately, those who resist reforms have to be won over in spirit as well as body. Their attitudes must change or be changed."[19]

Attitudinal changes are not easy to bring about. There may he outward signs of change, but really the old ways of doing things may persist. behavioural sciences have been engaged in researches on various methods of bringing about changes in attitudes to facilitate both organisational growth and individual satisfaction. Administrative reform as behavioural change and adaptation opens up new ways of organisatioal renewal that are expected to be continuous and informal.

The methods of implementation suggested by Caiden are really 'sources' of reform. Revolutionary change, bureaucratic awareness, legislative intervention, and

attitudinal transformation provide the impulses for administrative reform. Implementation *per se* is a more mundane job involving organisational arrangement to oversee the actual execution of specific reform proposals. For example, the Department of Administrative Reforms (later called department of Personnel and administrative Reforms) became the model agency in the Government of India to process and watch over implementation of the reform proposals contained in the several reports of the Administrative Reforms Commission. Usually, the responsibility for 'processing' the recommendations of a committee is entrusted to a smaller committee or to some senior officers. The head of the department / agency has to see that the reform proposals pertaining to his organisation are actually pursued and implemented within a definite time frame. When reforms involve creation of new posts and procurement of new material and equipment, budgetary adjustments have to be made accordingly. Sanctions are also to be obtained from appropriate authorities and tenders and contracts negotiated in time. Implementation would thus mean operationalisation of the specific proposals and their enforcement within a definite time frame. Experience shows that reform proposals very often remain in files and shelves for want of attention and supervision. Reforms that aversely affect the interests of the top bureaucracy are likely to be forgotten, and those that benefit them are likely to be pursued in right earnest.

Evaluation of Reform

Reforms, when accepted and implemented, should be monitored and evaluated. In course of the implementation process, many problems and difficulties are likely to arise The organisation must be prepared to receive these signals of dysfunctionality and make necessary adjustments to the original proposals. This presupposes a plan of implementation in a phased manner. At each stage the expected result should be predetermined, and as the implementation process gets going the actual results should be compared with the expected ones.

Evaluation is concerned with the examination of the final outcome of implementation. The objectives of reforms, as originally conceived, need to be specified and concretised, far as possible. For example, an original proposal to improve environmental standard has to be made more specific for evaluation purposes. How

much reduction in atmospheric pollution is attempted ? How many parks and open spaces have to be created or renovated ? How many trees have to be planted ? What kinds of checks should be imposed on automobiles ? These and many other questions should be raised and answered at the outset to operationalise the eoncept of 'improving environmental standard'. Without such specification, the organisational and procedural changes that would he effected to bring about improvement cannot be evaluated scientifically.

Admittedly there are many methodological problems involved in the evaluation of administrative reforms. Success measured merely in terms of contribution to the ultimate objectives of administrative performance may be illusory. Even if performance meets the standard, this may not have contributed to 'social efficiency or the public interest.' The end results of reform may not have been due solely to its implementation. Government operations can rarely be attributed to the performance of a single agency. The interactions with the environment (client, politician, business etc.) and the sister agencies are not easy to separate from the single-handed working of a particular agency.

Nevertheless, evaluation of reforms should be an integral part of a reform process. These difficulties urn no doubt genuine, and to circumvent these Inure rigorous methods of evaluation need to be evolved. Unless it can be proved objectively that reforms lead to definite improvement and produce concrete results, further reforms may not be easy to propose and pursue.

Acknowledgement

Notes and References

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16. Op.cit., pp.142 – 143.

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19. op. cit., p. 154.