

The Leadership role in handling challenges of change in self-reliant India

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Abstract

The Government of India launched the campaign of Self-Reliant India on 12th May 2020 to boost the economy through a special economic package of Rs.20.00 lakh crore. Public System is one of the five pillars the Mission relied upon to achieve Self-Reliant India. The Mission calls for the public system to be skillful, capable, proactive and dynamic, etc. Unquietly, the public system in the country is still struggling to come out of the bureaucratic behavior, and get rid of its reputation as an incompetent, unaccountable and unresponsive system. The Mission offers an opportunity to the public administration system and its leadership to challenge the old system and build a new administrative structure that strives for a self-reliant India. This paper uses the secondary source of literature like paper interviews, opinions of intellectual forums, Public Documents like Reports of the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission. Terms of Public Systems leadership and Administrative leadership are used interchangeably. Challenges and way-forward discussed in the paper are based on the literature review and my work experience as a Middle-Level Officer in the Secretariat.

Keywords: Self-Reliant India, leadership role, capacity building, change, challenges, 2nd ARC, mission karmayogi.

1. Introduction

The Government of India envisions self-reliant India or Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan for promoting local growth, and for reducing dependency on external sources. The Mission targeted to spend Rs. 20.00 Lakh crore to address the challenges thrown by the Covid-19 Pandemic for making India self-reliant and a global economic player. Self-Reliant India is competent to handle challenges and change, capable of problem-solving, and committed to achieving national goals and aspirations. Public Administration has a critical role in achieving the mission by converting the challenges of bureaucratic pathologies into an opportunity for getting rid of them, infusing vigor and strength into the public service delivery mechanism.

Under the mission, Government has announced measures like redefining MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), expanding

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Private Participation, increasing Foreign Direct Investment in Defense Sector, etc. The mission spans over five phases: i. Growth of Businesses including MSMEs with Rs 5.94 lakh crore, ii. Well Being of Poor, including migrants and farmers with Rs 3.10 lakh crore, iii. Agriculture Growth with Rs 1.5 lakh crore, iv. new Horizons of Growth with Rs 8,100 crore, v. Government Reforms and Enablers. The five phases include collateral-free automatic loans to MSMEs, 100% credit guarantee cover to banks and NBFCs (Non Banking Financial Company) on principal and interest, Rs 3 lakh crore Special liquidity scheme for NBFCs/HFCs (Housing Financial Companies/MFIs (Microfinance Institution), Interest subvention of 2% for prompt-payees of Mudra-Shishu loans with Rs 1,500 crore, Credit-linked subsidy scheme for middle-income families (Rs 6-18 lakh a year).

The Mission, Self-Reliant India, is an opportunity to exploit the country's potential of its strong consumer base and domestic market with a 130 billion population. Other factors include wider spread internet, diverse consumer habits, educated and ambitious youth, strong technical and engineering capabilities that are backed by top-notch educational institutes, etc. A policy environment also prevailed to complement this potential like New Education Policy, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Rural Self Employment and Training Institutes (RSETI). These policies promote quality education; encourage innovation and research to make India a knowledge hub. And, Make in India, Local for Global, and Vocal for Local can boost the domestic manufacturing industries, increase the number of start-ups and enterprises. Encouraging signs towards self-reliant India are evident from the fact that the country has emerged as the world's second-largest supplier of medical PPE and, achieved 63rd position among 190 Nations in the recent World Bank's ease of doing business 2020 report.

Many challenges are present for Self-Reliant India as well. The Country's productivity is 82% lower than OECD best performers; the employment rate is low and was falling before the 2020 crisis. Inequality is higher than in most advanced economies. The poorest 20% of households earn 4.1% of total income, the dominance of informal sector, lack of access to social safety nets etc. In the short term, a proper infrastructure to deliver efficient COVID-19 vaccination is urgent. In the medium term, achieving universal health coverage requires actions to tackle inefficiencies in the government's insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana. The changes induced by globalization force the countries to be competent in the marketplace, transform their governance systems and structures to suit the national and international standards. Today, the public administrative system is expected to involve civil society in the governance process, and partner with private developers in achieving socio-economic development. Without

showing empathy for poor and disadvantaged sections, and taking effective measures for their welfare, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan remains without soul. Public Administrative Systems occupy a leadership position in shaping, implementing, and influencing Socio, Economic, and Development Policies of the Country. The Industrial Policy Resolution 1956 envisioned Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) to lead the economic and industrial development of the Nation (Makhija, 2006).

Leaders in any organization play a greater role in addressing challenges. In general, a leader executes policies and programs efficiently, effectively, and economically. Leaders discharge functions of achieving organizational goals and solving problems. An effective leader is a visionary, planner, strong executor. He exhibits great willpower, commitment, persistence, etc. He/She owns organizational goals and strives for achieving them. A leader could influence one's ideas, thoughts, and actions. As a strategist, a leader foresees the opportunities, problems, and availability of resources required for task completion and, develops well-defined plans and solutions; and strives to get a positive outcome. Effective leaders challenge obsolete ideas, beliefs, structures, show new paths, and build new cultures. They mentor and share expertise, knowledge, and provide a futuristic perspective for the novice. They lead by example in the organization with a higher level of integrity, optimism, and judiciousness.

2. Literature review

The literature has vividly discussed qualities and skills which are expected from an effective leader. These qualities are manifold and indeed arriving at a definite set is difficult. The researchers have noted that leadership styles depend more on contextual factors such as the cultural and social environment in which the public sector organization operates. Van-Wart classified leadership behaviors as task-oriented, people-oriented, and organization oriented. Orazi et al. have summarized public sector leadership to be a mix of skills such as making a personal impact, giving purpose and direction, focusing on delivery, thinking strategically, getting the best out of people, and learning and improving oneself. Silong, Mohamad, Hassan, and Ariff contend that public sector leaders need abilities in communication, teamwork, problem-solving, relational skills, conflict resolution, project management, public relations, interpersonal skills, professionalism, visioning process, strategic thinking, technical and specialized skills, change management, research skills, and leadership training, coaching, and developing subordinates. Leslie and Canwell (2010) observe that leaders must possess insights for successful change within complex systems, cognitive skills to handle the demanding en-

vironment, emotional intelligence to motivate people, and must be proactive in building leadership at all levels of the organization. They should constantly update their knowledge and keep track of recent developments in their domain of work and lead by example.

The literature review shows that leaders require effective human resource management. He/she should have the ability to spot the right talent within or outside the organization and place it at the right position, willingness to develop skills of their employees, incentivize better performance and penalize the opposite, institutionalizing better wage/incentive policies and performance-based incentives. For example, an efficient leader identifies the potential of every member in the organization, channelizes their knowledge, and skills to achieve organizational goals, and rewards their contributions promptly. A Leader is expected to build positive and close interpersonal relationships with his/her employees. The leaders should work as if they are one of the team members and be accessible to the employees. They must meet their employees regularly and take feedback from them. A leader needs to take efforts to improve the quality and capacity of staff, encourage and develop secondary leadership in the organization, and establish a new culture of the highest value system in the organization.

Killefer & Mendonca (2006), have found that there is significant evidence that productivity advancement in government organizations has not kept pace with the increases found in the private sector. They have further mentioned that workers expressed strong appreciation for positive aspects of their jobs, including autonomy and freedom, the job itself, a sense of achievement, and being able to work as part of a team. They related the favorable factors with the higher-order needs of Maslow's hierarchy and Herzberg's satisfiers two-factor theory of motivation (Bounds, Dobbins, & Fowler, 1995; Griffin, 2002). The limiting factors relate closely to Herzberg's hygiene factors such as supervision, interpersonal relationships, organizational policies, compensation, and working conditions as well as to the two key elements of leadership as defined by Fleishman (1973) 'initiation of structure' and 'tolerance by the leader for two-way communication', with the followers.

From the above perspectives, one could understand that the leadership role in public administration is multi-dimensional and very complex. He/she requires to make effective policy formulation, bold decisions, speedy implementation of plans and programs, address people's needs and aspirations, achieve public interest. In the process, he/she is accountable for the outcomes of his/her decisions and actions, values, and spirit of the constitution. The leaders have to pay special attention to participatory decision-making, a proper understanding of the socio-economic and cultural uniqueness of the envi-

ronment in and around the public systems. The most critical responsibility of the public sector leader might be motivating and preparing his administrative machinery, and extracting their willful contribution for the execution of policies, and service delivery. Further, leadership has a very important role and responsibility in making well-thought decisions based on proper logic and rationale, taking bold, consistent, quick decisions regarding uncertain environments. Leaders are expected to be good at communication with different stakeholders like the public, political heads, and their employees, and should be well associated with them. A public sector leader is expected to be a person of honesty and integrity.

India has been trying for establishing a dynamic administrative system in the country. National Program for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPC-SCB) is one such recent initiative of the Government of India announced in the year 2020. This Mission aims to develop capacities of the public functionaries as per changing and pressing needs of public systems of the country. The mission expects the government personnel to modernize their thinking, administrative approaches and improve their skill set. Mission Document calls for the civil servants to move from a rules-based to roles-based human resource management system. It aims at a radical improvement of the government's human resource management practices to augment the capacity of civil servants. Civil Servant is a Karmayogi for the Nation's public service. Every Civil Servant is expected to be proactive & polite, professional & progressive, energetic & enabling, transparent & tech-enabled, creative & constructive, imaginative & innovative. Implementing Mission Karmayogi will have a direct bearing on the Self-Reliant India success.

3. Challenges

Challenges to change exist in every human endeavor and in every time, and the same is true for achieving Self-Reliant India. There is a perceptible tendency in the administrative systems that policy action requires public demand. The demand of a policy takes its course of action and consumes huge time and effort before converting into a policy demand, as it involves consolidation of people's interest, political negotiations, legislative and administrative process, etc. These time-consuming processes adversely affect people's life and living conditions. The literature review shows that leadership is and should be proactive. Proactive policy action by the leadership in the public administrative systems could avoid many public issues before they assume the form of demand and defective policy process. This can enable evidence-based policy decision making, in-depth analyses of each sector, carefully understanding the type of reforms needed, before devising and implementing the concerned policies.

The second Administrative Reform Commission has observed many bottlenecks in the implementation of Missions and schemes in the country. Administrative processes are suffering from a multiplicity of laws governing the same or similar set of issues, multiple approvals/permission stages, too many points of contact between investors and authorities, lack of transparency in the administration of clearances and approvals, a large number of returns and amount of information need to be provided to many departments/agencies, little communication and information-sharing among the related departments. There is a demand for simplification of administrative, regulatory approval processes such as maximum timelines, experimenting more widely with single-window clearance and easing of employment protection legislation, etc. With the same set of practices and behaviors, it could be difficult to achieve the intents and targets of Self-Reliant India.

The Sixth Central Pay Commission's comments in this connection are worth noting. The Commission has taken note that for the common man, bureaucracy denotes routine and repetitive procedures, paperwork, and delays. This is even though the Government and Bureaucracy exist to facilitate the citizens in the rightful pursuit of their legal activities. Very often, even simple matters are kept pending for long in the public offices due to the limitations such as rigidities at the workplace, over-centralization of powers, highly hierarchical method of functioning. And, diversity of authority from accountability, non-performance of administrative structures, poor service quality, lack of responsiveness, and abuse of authority have been eroding the trust in governance systems.

Another major challenge that is coming in the way of achieving Atmanirbhar Bharat is ethical standards in public organizations. Ethics is generally defined as a set of standards that society places on itself and guides the behavior, choices, and actions of its individuals and that society. The Committee on Prevention of Corruption ('Santhanam Committee'-1964) had remarked that lack of moral earnestness, which has been a conspicuous feature of recent years, is perhaps the greatest single factor that hampers the growth of strong traditions of integrity.

Inadequate capacity building of public personnel results in policy deficiency, creation of ineffective public structures, improper implementation of laws, and flagship programs of the Governments. The capacity for a comprehensive understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of the social problems, policy framing, and grievance redressal makes the public system's functioning more accurate and reliable. Though the importance of capacity building for improving administrative competencies is well acknowledged, its pace is very slow and not up to the needs of the administration. Civil

Servants continue to exhibit a very cold response to the problems and pain of the citizens for want of capacities and skills such as strategic human resource management, negotiation with multi-stakeholders, effective communication, new economic management, data analytics, appraisal of projects implementation, preparing tender documents, etc. These factors are acting as barriers to Self-Reliant India. The Document of Mission Karmayogi has also highlighted the challenges encountered by the administrative systems in the country. The Document noted that the existing training policy interventions are sporadic and largely confined to individual and intermittent innovations. A collaborative working environment is lacking in the public organization & due to the factors of working in silos rather than overall unifying vision and understanding of national priorities, lack of lifelong and continuous learning environment for its civil servants, lack of exchange of knowledge, etc. Public systems in general have a narrow scope for dynamic utilization of human resources. Any such reform in the existing and established procedures is usually taken as a threat to the interests of civil servants further, reforms of human resource management in public systems result in political dilemmas eroding the conducive environment, zeal, and enthusiasm of motivated leaders. As persistent confrontations could lead to withdrawal of proactiveness. There are other kinds of scenarios in the public systems where-in, in the name of progress and reforms leaders produce defective systems/decisions/actions leading to wastage of public money, negation of public interest, short-lived reforms, etc. Effective accountability systems can reduce these kinds of unfruitful actions in the public systems.

Lack of Accountability which is a common reason usually cited for inefficiency in governance is the inability within the system to hold the Civil Services accountable for their actions. It negates the purpose of reforms. Projects mandated to be completed in two years, continue for twenty years, and the persons responsible for the delay are hardly questioned. Public systems are good at drafting policies but fall behind when it comes to enforcement and implementation. Atmanirbhar Bharat cannot be implemented in isolation, and the entire gamut of working people in the country needs to be a part of it. Defective policy framing, unclear roles, and responsibilities, ineffective enforcement mechanisms, protection provisions available for public personnel, etc. are posing challenges to extracting accountability from the administrative machinery. Description of job role is mostly very vague and inelastic. This is directly impacting the outcome and accountability for the actions of administrative machinery. Further, disciplinary proceedings initiated against delinquent government servants and impositions of penalties are not up to the rate and gravity of delinquency. It is primarily because at most levels, authority is divorced from accountability. Lacking a objective

performance evaluation system is another reason for the lack of accountability in the public service delivery system.

Clear distribution of powers and responsibilities enables a system to function smoothly, and swiftly. The lack of such an effective system pushes the decisions into delay, duplicity, and dilemma. It is customary that every trivial matter is thrown to the next levels to decide upon. Problems are dealt with insufficient evidence or supporting material, leading to ill-informed decisions, injustice to the aggrieved party, or landing into prolonged legal battles. There is hardly any system in place which measures how wrong decisions lead to legal cases and fix individual responsibility for such defective decision making. Therefore, a clear separation of powers and functions is required to enforce responsibility, authority, and accountability. Reducing the levels of hierarchy also helps to enforce accountability. Leaders in the public systems need to address these challenges for achieving Self-Reliant India. Certain important functions need to be limited to the middle and higher-level authority leaving routine one to the lower levels with corresponding accountability parameters.

Traditionally, public personnel were considered passive actors in the performance of their functions. They were expected to complete their job within the scope as prescribed and defined. Hackman & Oldham (1975) had rightly observed that work characteristics such as autonomy, feedback, task significance, task identity, skill variety tend to be conceptualized as organizational aspects to which the person adjusts. This finding could be considered true even for today's Public Service Systems. The administrative machinery is still working in an environment where-in goals, objectives, procedures, and processes of public functions and functionaries are superimposed, scripted, and are unchangeable in general. The second Administrative Reform Commission has observed that in the common experience Civil Service resists change. Their Bureaucratic Behavior as Michel Crozier explains "evokes the slowness, the ponderousness, the routine, the complication of procedures, and the maladapted responses of 'bureaucratic' organizations to the needs which they should satisfy, and the frustrations which their members, clients, or subjects consequently endure".

Rules and Procedures are not undesirable. They are meant for regulating human conduct in discharging public affairs. However, rules are man-made; consequently suffer from incompleteness, ill-defined ideas, and concepts, rigidity, subjectivity, etc. Ample scope is allowed for civil servants who can deny a grievance redressal under the guise of rules and procedures. Civil Servants, largely practice that their primary duty is to adhere to rule making redressal of grievance subservient to those rules and procedures. Interpreta-

tion of rule often suffers from limited knowledge and capacities and more self-aggrandizement of the civil servant. This kind of practice throws the common man to the receiving end and denies their rightful grievance redressal. Keeping certain services out of rule purview would limit the discretion of the public personnel in addressing a public grievance, improve their problem-solving skills, and make them accountable for/her action and inaction.

Red-tapism is one of the consequences of the irrational application of rules and procedures. Bureaucracy is taking shelter under the rules and procedures. In the name of adhering to rules, issues are kept moving from one level to another level delaying and depriving prompt and logical ending for an issue and forcing the party to the grief. Withdrawal is evident in the public systems whether it is from decision making or taking prompt action or avoiding the public pain. These tendencies and practices are leading to red-tapism in the public systems. Lack of incentives for taking bold and proactive decisions is also acting as major discouragement for the public personnel. Effective systems are required that could interpret ideas, and intentions behind every administrative action and inaction of civil servants. The second Administrative Reform Commission has pointed out that an integrated index to measure the quality of governance has not evolved so far. In the absence of any such index, only indirect conclusions can be drawn about the standards of governance. Rapid economic growth, increasing literacy, improved health indices, etc. point towards improving governing standards. At the same time, the poor image of the government in the minds of large sections of society points towards inefficient and ineffective administration.

Another area of challenge for change in the public systems is the Grievance Redressal Mechanisms. The basic objective of the Grievance Redressal is to listen to the grievance of a citizen and take an upright action to redress his grievance as per the entitlement. A Public system is expected to put in place a dynamic public grievance redressal mechanism with a special focus on the information delivery system. The level of achievement and satisfaction in this respect is very minimal. There is a need to bring about a total change in the attitude/behavior of public servants towards redressal of public grievances and to pinpoint responsibility for action against grievances of the people. The Centre for Media Studies (CMS) study shows that delivery of public services is not up to the satisfaction of the majority of the public. It is found that in seven out of the 11 departments covered in the study, less than one-third of the citizens are satisfied with the services delivered. The second ARC has observed that there are hardly any effective complaint redress systems in place in most departments. Most of the times, citizens are unaware that such systems exist, and departments make no effort to educate them. The behavior of cutting-edge level employees is

another area of concern. The Commission has recommended a statutory form of Redress Grievance Mechanism to ensure that public systems are accountable to their actions.

4. Conclusion

The Literature Review provides the list of qualities and behaviors that are expected from the leadership of an organization. But, the public systems operate in a unique environment and deal with social-economic problems of people, and have been suffering from deep rooted and unique functional and behavioral problems. Multi-disciplinary explanations and approaches are required for understanding problems in the public administrative setting. Certainty in behavior, predicting, and drawing definite conclusions about administrative action/decision are still big challenge for the research of the public systems. There is a gap between the problems of the public administration system and the tools & techniques available for addressing them.

Without revisiting the challenges in the public service delivery systems, Self-Reliant India would be a distant dream. The literature review indicates the requirement for more research into the practices, procedures, functioning of the public system, human resource management, and the role of leadership in public administrative systems. Need of the hour is to develop such norms, tools, and techniques unique to the Public administration to address challenges for change in Self-reliant India.

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