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## **UNIT 5 ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION CULTURE: TOWARDS ICT BASED REFORMS**

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### **5.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the meaning and importance of organisation culture;
- describe the culture of government organisations;
- examine the mechanisms to bring in reforms in the existing administrative culture; and
- analyse the limitations and suggest measures to ensure reforms.

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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"Ultimately, the government worker of the future has to be a knowledge worker."

"Men well governed should seek no other liberty, for there is no greater liberty than a good government." This in times when the waves of change point towards a liberal economic framework and exit of state from sectors that could be better done through private enterprise has far reaching implications. While this is so, it definitely does not mean curtains for governments since as long as the civilisations exist; governance of some form has to exist to ensure order and fair play. The areas of operation may change but the societal dependence on state is inevitable and if that is the case, it is important that the state does its task in the manner giving least inconvenience and maximum facility to its citizens. Never before was the craving for looking at options and alternatives to improve governance stronger than now. Though there are many ways of achieving that, one has to find out methods that are easiest and cost effective and it is here that the tools of Information and Communications Technology score over others.

ICTs enable transformation of a very vital component of governance, that is, administrative organisation. It plays a significant role in enabling the organisation to be citizen centred and service oriented in the context of globalisation. In this Unit, we will be focusing on the administrative organisation culture and how ICTs can facilitate it to become citizen centred and vibrant with the changing environment.

To mention we have used the terms 'administrative organisation,' 'government organisation' and 'bureaucratic organisation' interchangeably for convenience sake.

To begin with, we will now delve on the meaning and importance of organisation culture.

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### **5.2 MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATION CULTURE**

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The culture of any organisation is the internal environment of the organisation to which the members of the organisation subscribe. This is characterised by certain defining organisational traits, pattern of thinking, and philosophy of living on and off work. Although culture is not strictly a part of organisation design, culture and design must complement each other in order for organisation to function smoothly.

Organisational culture is the set of values that defines for members what the organisation stands for, how it operates, and what it considers important. The organisational culture communicates important information about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Most managers acknowledge that a strong and clear organisational culture helps provide a common frame of reference for managerial decision-making and other organisational activities.

An organisation's culture normally forms over time and is often deeply influenced by the values of the firm's founders. As organisational culture evolves, various symbols, stories, heroes, slogans and ceremonies emerge. These facilitate the perpetuation of culture.

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### **5.3 ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION CULTURE: A CASE FOR ICT**

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Everyday when one sees tens of thousands of citizens approach the government, one can't help asking a question- whether it is possible to live up to their expectations. The expectations that are huge while resources at disposal are thin. To make matters worse, systems to administer those resources are primitive and inefficient.

There are constraints; sometimes due to lack of resources and manpower, while many a times there are vested interests not allowing it to be done a particular way. On many occasions the general lethargy and casualness that has crept into our system becomes the major impediment.

The vast apparatus of governance that we've got is now slowly coming to a state where it has stopped moving without getting a push and the unfortunate thing is that not many of us have the capacity and the wherewithal to do so. This notwithstanding, what is without doubt is that the systems of governance lying in the hands of powerful and influential need to be transformed for catering to the requirements of all, whatever their face may be.

This rhetoric might sound a bit cliché, after all there are so many who have been talking of this. What remains unaddressed, however, is that many of these issues have been getting swept below the carpet without any visible change. Nobody is able to tell us where the real action is and where the solution is. One thing perhaps is certain; the solution does not lie in the talk and cannot be in pronouncements. If we've to improve the administration of governments anywhere, we would have to do some serious introspection, look inwards, do a system analysis and figure out where the rub lies.

Every government department has two lives; one that it lives internally while the other that it lives with its clients, the citizens as we call them. Internally, the organisations suffer from problems of malfunctioning due to lack of proper and smooth systems; while externally it makes its clients suffer. There are many in the government who are frighteningly overworked while there are many more who are woefully under worked or do not want to work. Due to this it is very difficult to distinguish where the disease is and who the diseased is.

To any casual observer, a government office is a place where papers move or get stalled, papers containing loads of information affecting people. This information moves through a huge hierarchy giving scope to manoeuvrability at all levels. This leads to imperfections in its processing leading to bad decisions that range from being whimsical at times to looking prejudiced sometimes. The bureaucratic system that was based on the impersonal arrangements is now caught in the web of its

procedures. The same procedures that were created to protect it from its ill wishers are seriously hampering the lives of its well wishers.

The bureaucratic culture in a government organisation is characterised by traits where fixed ideas and achievement against predetermined targets hold precedence. It is based on formal rigidities, systems, clearly spelt out rules and rationally laid down guidelines and procedures. The bureaucratic organisation design is the overall configuration of structural components that define jobs, groupings of jobs, hierarchy, patterns of authority, approaches to coordination, and line staff differentiation into a single, unified organisational system. The organisation is characterised by a hierarchical set up, a top to bottom approach and is largely a closed system. Unity of command and compliance to set rules and procedures takes precedence over rest. The accent is more on doing least number of mistakes rather than experimentation and risk taking and committing errors as a result of that. The stereotypical belief about bureaucracies is that they are inflexible, monolithic organisations with uncaring employees who create red tape.

A thorough system analysis would, however, confirm that nine out of ten times, both the prevention and cure of this disease is possible only if we allow technology to take precedence over the norm. Internally, technology solutions would ensure that the non-performers can't hide themselves and the decision support systems are on a stronger wicket with properly processed information base. Externally, technology would ensure that the discretionary advantages and favours possible in the tech-less system are eliminated allowing level playing field to everybody, which in essence, is the purpose of government. ICTs though can play a catalytic role but cannot alone change this culture. In order to achieve meaningful gains, the whole process needs to be backed by strong willed effort to change the organisational culture and then sustain it over a reasonable frame of time.

The immediate need of the hour is to make administration get a citizen centred focus and to make use of technology for storing, retrieving, processing, handling and doling out information. However to do this, every office needs to do some groundwork. It has to carry out the system analysis to weed out incorrect procedures and lengthy formalities and above all, right sizing so as to get right people for right positions by training and re-staffing, if required. The quality of people manning various positions needs a real push if we have to make any headway in improving the face of administration.

This however does not mean that technology by itself can make administration transparent, smart and responsive, as there are host of other factors that influence but it is also true that technology is a sine qua non, an indispensable condition for achieving that.

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#### **5.4 TOWARDS CHANGED ORGANISATION CULTURE**

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To put in place a data network through ICT in a government organisation, one needs to:

- gain high-level management support for the project;
- undertake a pilot project;
- ensure that all users have access to the network, to provide an adequate population of users;
- make sure the networking is integrated with the organisations' core office automation applications;
- have the central IT unit co-ordinate introduction of technology; and
- tackle the difficult questions of security, reliability, cost and ownership.

For building the new culture, one needs to:

- demonstrate possibilities to those who are interested;
- provide organisation with a presence on internet;
- provide a way to receive information from internet;
- create an internal process to guide Internet use;
- provide positive role models for users;
- provide new mechanisms to support the rhetoric of organisation; and
- use technology to implement and administer technology

#### **5.4.1 Mechanisms**

In order to bring about the change in the bureaucratic culture and infuse in them new thoughts and urge for creativity, ICT and its solutions can play a major role. This can allow them to gain insights into expanding frontiers of information technology but also help them become knowledge workers. This would also free their minds and open them to open ended thinking.

In order to achieve this objective, there has to be designed and tailored programmes to sensitise them to information needs on one hand and bringing technical skills of functionaries on the other.

The main objectives of these programmes are to:

- identify ICT applications that can provide improved services to citizens and help public administration in improving planning, monitoring and administrative processes;
- demonstrate the feasibility of implementing such applications by specifying broad architecture, detailed design and creating prototype application software (wherever feasible); and
- disseminate the work to public administrators that promote and use e-governance

A major shift has occurred in the operation of the public sector in India and other countries over the last decade or so. At the heart of this change is the proliferation of new instruments or tools of public action-regulation, contracts, cooperative agreements, reimbursement schemes, tax subsidies, vouchers, insurance, and many more. Moreover, many of these new or newly expanded tools have in common a reliance on a host of third parties-such as commercial banks, non-profit organisations, other levels of government, or for-profit companies-to implement public programmes. The adoption of these tools has, thus, transformed the public sector from a provider to an arranger of services with profound implications on the nature and content of public management and democratic governance more generally. Those involved in public administration must consequently learn not only how to operate public agencies but also the distinctive operating requirements of the different tools, many of which involve complex collaborative relationships with private contractors, regulated industries, non-profit agencies and other levels of government.

The governments would, therefore, need to play a pivotal role in calling attention to this development and producing educational and other materials to promote understanding of it. This should include:

- emphasis on 'new governance' concept and its implications to accountability, management and democratic control; and
- instructional materials to acquaint both policy scholars and practitioners with these alternative tools and with the "tools approach" that focuses attention on them. More than that, it is needed to establish an agenda for future action that might improve the operation of public programmes by sensitising policymakers

and policy administrators to the distinctive features and operating demands of the various tools that public programmes embody.

Within the broad framework of these objectives, there is a need to take up the following types of activities:

- developing conceptual papers on strategies that governments can follow to introduce e-governance;
- working with specific departments/programmes to identify opportunities for developing ICT applications;
- designing ICT applications and identifying hardware and software resources that would be required to implement such applications;
- developing the software as prototypes (wherever feasible) to demonstrate the feasibility of building such applications;
- conducting cost-benefit analysis of e-governance projects and preparing comprehensive evaluation reports;
- documenting case studies of successful e-governance applications already developed in the field;
- designing workshops for sensitising senior echelons of public administrators; and
- developing papers, reports and films to disseminate the output.

#### **5.4.2 Limitations**

The resistance to change is inevitable, especially, so if the status quo gives the vested interests additional clout. Such a shift in the bureaucratic culture may also meet with a similar response as the bureaucracy ever so reluctant to open up may create many hurdles to see that the power they wield over the information they control is not reduced by bringing it into public domain through net. Besides this, openness and transparency in administration, which such activities attempt to achieve, would also be feared by those sections of employees who do not want to get exposed for their inefficiency. Another constraint is paucity of funds as the case is with most of the public bodies in India. This exactly is the reason why such projects should be taken up as public-private initiative getting entrepreneurs to invest in them. Another challenge is to develop public awareness about ICT and making the citizens use such mediums for accessing civic services.

ICTs in the administrative parlance have been simply equated to computerisation resulting in myriad of computers with absolutely no accent on the 'information' part of IT. Anybody who understands ICT would agree that it is almost 80% in the information part and only rest in the latter, that is, technology. The wrong understanding of this definition in organisation has, however, resulted in needless addition of computers leading to a system which neither has citizen focus and nor has evolved out of the real understanding of the maladies the particular system is afflicted with. Most of the computers lying with various organisations are relegated to being used as typewriters; more than 90% of their processing and storing capacities are unutilised/underutilised.

In most of the cases, if every government department can take a lead and analyse its functioning, simple local ICT solutions keeping citizens as focus can be found. Due to the scale of operation and multiplicity of tasks what one needs in government system is creation and maintenance of databases that allows the retrieval and sorting of data easier and faster. Smooth front ends could allow user-friendly access to these databases. Networking and connectivity should be ensured wherein all these related computers and databases talk to each other, share the information and live

symbiotically. A stand-alone computer serves no purpose and is an injustice to its inherent capacity. These computers talking sub consciously without any human intervention is the key to administrative reforms. It is also important that once the databases are readied and set, any further transaction be compulsorily routed through the data base so that the database is routinely and sub-consciously updated and remains relevant and dynamic at all times.

The bane of most government databases is that individual rather than systems drive it and hence, most of it is never updated once the individual departs. It is, therefore, essential that this process is ingrained into the departmental bloodstream and the transactions are invariably done through the database and updated without any conscious effort. Also, common databases for multiple departments need serious attention and promotion. There should be centralised maintenance of databases at various strategic levels. Last not the least; strong political and administrative will is required to achieve this in fairly minimal time.

### **5.4.3 Suggestions**

Changing the administrative bureaucratic culture to a tech savvy, modern looking, flexible, goal-oriented culture requires significant efforts both at the technical as well as organisational and personnel level. There are few management tips, as suggested below that can help usher in such a change:

- **Making a Compelling Case for Change**

Successful organisations have one important thing in common - the people who have a stake in the outcome see the need to change. Most researches also found that as employees' understanding of a need for a change went down, the failure rate went up. Creating a change readiness is, therefore, critical.

Leaders of successful new initiatives made a compelling case to critical stakeholders before doing anything else. How did they do it? The change managers were able to make a compelling case for change in their organisation by creating a change readiness in the officials and employees.

- **Communicate Formally and Informally**

Formal communications – meetings and memos – are necessary, but they are not sufficient in times of change and transition. Employees need to know how the new direction relates to their day-to-day work. Officials at all levels need to talk about how the change relates to day-to-day decisions, actions and events.

Look for opportunities to discuss differences and similarities with new methods or structures during team meetings and one-to-one meetings.

Most officials and employees need to hear a new idea many times before they absorb and integrate the new information. This is, especially true, when the new way of doing things is significantly different from current practices. As they hear about a change and talk through how it supports organisation goals, they mentally rehearse how they will accomplish work using different means or different methods. For a significant change, this will not happen in a day or a week. Significant transformation requires time.

- **Personalise the Message: What Does This Mean for Me?**

Employees want answers to questions about how a change will affect them, and how his or her job will change.

Until the employees know what part they will play and how the change will impact them directly, they can withdraw into worry. Their energy is not available to work on change or on the business of the organisation.

Someone on the executive level can only answer questions like this in generalities; employees will look to their supervisors to gain information. The more preparation and information direct supervisors have, the better equipped they will be to answer questions.

And, it is impossible to have all the answers. Draw the picture of what you do know and the boundaries of what is unknown.

- **Acknowledge the Unknowns**

The maxim, "I'll communicate something when I know something," does not work in change situations. In times of change, employees fill in the blanks with their worst fears. Every bit of factual information helps.

The statement, "I don't know," is more helpful than no communication at all. When you do not know an answer, tell employees when you will report on progress finding answers.

Most employees do not expect their directors to be perfect and all knowing. They will accept when you are not able to find answers. Be sure, though, not to let questions fall into a black hole. Reporting that you have no new information is better than silence.

- **Surface Rumours and Fill in the Blanks**

In many government organisations while the computerisation process is on, it is observed that rumours regarding lay off etc. hold sway. By the next day, the rumour spreads to the entire organisation. Employees latch onto such messages as fact. The members become incensed and their productivity plummets.

Rumours thrive on lack of credible information. One simple thing managers can do is regularly ask, "What's the scuttlebutt? What are the latest rumours and gossip?" Bringing rumours out into the open deprives them of their power and provides a chance to replace rumours with solid facts or at least informed denials.

While it is important to quash rumours, they can also be a source of information. Rumours also provide a clue about what people are worried about, and where they are having trouble finding information. Look for patterns and fill in with factual information and frank discussion of unknowns.

- **Practice What You Preach**

When management actions do not match the changes they are asking others to make, employees grow cynical. One administrator extolled the virtues of self-organising teams, but continued to dictate the details of team membership and assignments. He even stopped by developers' desks to give them advice on how to write code. He talked the talk but his actions showed he did not walk the walk of self-organisation.

Successful change requires changes from everyone, not just the lower levels of the organisation. Wise managers do not ask other employees to make changes they are not willing to make themselves.

Sometimes it only looks like there is a contradiction between what the executives say and what the executives do. Explain the apparent inconsistencies to avoid the appearance of hypocrisy and the resultant cynicism.

- **Acknowledge and Build on What Employees Value**

In periods of change, people struggle hardest to keep what they value most. Employees do not change based on logic; they change to keep something that is valuable to them.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy for employees to articulate what they value about the way they do their work. One finds that asking the question a different way help surface the information. As employees work out the details of how the new ways will work, ask, “What were the strengths of the way we have been doing things? How do those strengths map to the new way?”

Acknowledge that the old way was not stupid or bad – it worked well at one time, but it does not fit the current context.

- **Reframe Resistance**

When employees resist, the natural tendency is to push harder, give more reasons or even threaten. But exploring the response to change can be a source of important information.

When faced with a change, some employees are afraid they will not be able – or will not have time – to learn the new skills, methods or procedures to be successful with the change. Employees who do not believe they can be successful are reluctant to try a new way. Sometimes they are not interested in learning new skills too.

How a person feels about his or her senior colours what they hear. Even if employees have never spoken to the senior, they have a relationship with him based on their good or ill regard for him. Communication from a well-respected senior will garner more attention than communication from one the employees regard as inept or irrelevant. And they are less likely to want to go through the disruption of a change for someone with whom they have a negative relationship.

Past experience with change will affect how employees greet the current change initiative. When past change efforts have failed, fizzled, or flopped, people will be understandably sceptical. When you hear someone say, “It won’t work here,” or “We’ve tried that before,” it is a clue that people have been burned in the past. Arguing will not help, but curiosity may. Probe to find out what is behind the categorical statements. You may uncover useful information that will help you avoid pitfalls with the current change. Or you may be able to point out what has changed since the last time that makes the change more likely to succeed this time.

Resistance is a label that cuts off a conduit for information. Resistance is when someone is not doing what you want him or her to or expect him or her to. Listen and probe to find out why.

- **Employees Do Not Resist Change, They Resist Coercion**

There is a misplaced notion that people hate change. In reality, people choose change all the time-big changes. People choose to marry, to have children or adopt children, to divorce, or join any foreign assignment, etc. These are all life-altering changes. Yet people choose them freely. Most of the time, people buck up and muddle through when change is thrust upon them by circumstances. Most people manage to find their way through to the other side of that change event. Clearly, people do not hate or resist all changes. One should realise that they do not resist change itself; they resist coercion.

Employees will reject even insignificant changes when they feel coerced. The reality is, it is impossible to make someone else change. Lay out the reasons, acknowledge the emotions, provide support and give employees a chance to choose change.

Not everyone will change at the same pace, and some may choose not to change at all. If there is another place in the organisation where they can be valuable, support them to find that place and if there is not, support them to move on.

- **Empathise**

Every so often we run into administrators who are not very patient with employees going through change. There are directors who would say, 'Move on or move out,' there would be many who would say 'I've thought about it and there's no reason for you to feel that way.'

In reality, change involves loss: loss of routines, relationships, turf, expertise and status. It is normal for people to experience intense emotions during times of change. Pretending those emotions do not exist will not make them go away; failing to acknowledge emotional responses may actually prolong and amplify them.

This does not mean administrators need to play psychologist; they do need to listen, empathise and acknowledge that feelings are real and valid.

Real change takes time. One is not expected to complete a major transformation in a matter of weeks. Transitions that involve significant changes-new methods or reorganisations-are measured in months and years, not days and weeks.

Expect that the world around you will shift during the transition and be prepared to adapt to new opportunities and circumstances. Be willing to refine goals and plans based on new information from both inside and outside the organisation. Plan for small wins and celebrate those wins.

Start change communication with a compelling reason for the change, then communicate, communicate, communicate until the employees begin to forget they ever did things a different way.

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## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

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ICTs have taken up the challenge of re-building administrative culture in government organisations. They have brought in an improved and qualitative work culture by fostering:

- open, transparent, flexible and decentralised organizations;
- information sharing and dissemination;
- shift in the traditional organisational culture of neutrality, anonymity and political accountability;
- speed, accuracy and efficiency in day to day work;
- participative, collaborative, cost effective and responsive work culture ; and
- values of public interest, public discourse and dialogue, and democratic citizenship in administrative organisations and has enhanced public accountability and trust of the masses in administration.

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## 5.6 ACTIVITY

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1. Visit a government department or agency. Observe the functioning and the work culture. Please jot down your observations about the behaviour and action of the employees and officials.
2. Narrate some suggestive measures to revamp the administrative culture of our government organisations.

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