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SOME PROPOSITIONS ABOUT
INSTITUTION BUILDING

by

Udai Pareek

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**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT
AHMEDABAD**

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SOME PROPOSITIONS ABOUT INSTITUTION BUILDING

Udai Pareek

Although institution building has become a technical term being used for the process of helping institutions develop through transfer of knowledge, the term institution building can be used to denote the process of the growth and development of an institution or an organization which is primarily meant to develop some values and norms in a society. Institution building in this wider meaning would include establishing an institution (not necessarily on the model of an outside or a foreign institute), nurturing the institute through its earlier years, and making sure that the institute passes through the various stages successfully. Using this broader definition, institution building can be conceived as one end a continuance, on the other end of which is institutional decay and death; one point on this continuum towards the latter end may be institutional stagnation. The problem of institution building - that is paying attention to the process of establishing, nurturing, and making an institution self-sufficient and self-renewing - is quite important in India, and has preoccupied the attention of various persons who are concerned with institutional effectiveness, although they might not have given explicit attention to the problem. It may

be useful to pay attention to several dimensions of institution building. The propositions which are stated below are meant to draw attention to some of these dimensions.

Goals

One important aspect of institution building is to pay attention to the broad and specific goal of the institute concerned. Two propositions may be stated in this regard.

Proposition 1: If the goals of an institution are perceived as important for the society, and these are seen as challenging, and further if these are shared by them, the process of institution building will be smooth.

There are several implications of this proposition. The goals of the institution in the first place should be seen as important goals for the society. If there is a felt need for some aspect which could be fulfilled by the institution, more value will be given to the goals. It is also important that the goals are seen as prestigious and people take pride in associating themselves with the achievements of these goals. Equally important is that the goals are seen as challenging and those which are not easily attainable, and the achievement of which may enhance the image of those who are associated with the institution. In such a case the goals will sustain not only the interest and involvement of the members but will help in creating wider interest of the society in the institute,

and the institution will be able to attract abler and more committed people. One of the main factors for the success of the first two institutes of management when these were established was the felt need for meeting the goals, including preparing competent people for managing various organisations (certainly, in the beginning, the industrial organisations were more in the forefront). There are examples of institutions which started off very well but either the goals for which they were set up were not well defined or were too narrow or too broad, and the need for meeting the goals either did not exist or was not sufficiently created in advance. To ensure the success of an institution it is necessary that we pay enough attention to creating the need for such an institution, and defining the goals in clearer terms. It would also require working with the potential users or clients so that a strong lobby for the support of the institute may be created amongst them.

Proposition 2: If the goals are widely shared amongst the members of the institution and these are fairly focussed, the institution has good chances of success.

The success of various institutes in the beginning established in India can be attributed to the wide sharing of goals amongst members who joined them in the beginning. This may happen either as

a result of people with some homogeneous ideological orientation coming together to establish an institution, or by a deliberate process of discussing the goals thoroughly before the institution rushes into concrete programmes. of action. It is extremely important that people who start and join an institute in the beginning are able to voice their concern and have an opportunity to contribute to the identification of goals more clearly. It is equally important that the goals are fairly focussed in the beginning. Every institution which starts as a potential effective organisation, and which seems to cater to important needs of the society, gets continuous pressure for taking over various types of work. An institution in such a situation can easily get sucked into endless activities and may soon find diffusing itself too thinly. This may become a handicap for the growth of the institution. It is necessary that an institution resists the temptation of taking on too much work of diversified nature for some time in the beginning. By deliberately denying itself opportunities to go into very interesting and prestigious areas, and by focussing on some specific goals, the institute may be able to prepare itself thoroughly and it may be able to build large potential for taking on important diversified work more effectively in later years.

People

Persons joining and working in an institute are very important dimensions of institution building. No institution can afford to

neglect this aspect. Three propositions are proposed in this regard.

Proposition 3: If the institute identifies key, committed people in the beginning, before identifying the specific programmes or fields of action, the institution has a better chance of development and survival.

Often institutes face the problem of proving their worth by taking on specific programmes. In the beginning this may be seen as giving good results. However, in the long run this may not be good for the health and proper development of the institute. Those institutes which have invested enough time in the beginning in locating people, and then preparing programmes on the basis of the expertise available through these people, have been found to have made much more impact than the institutions which seize the opportunities available in the field and quickly get into action, and then go on recruiting people to fulfil the obligation they have taken. Kamla Chowdhry (1976) has drawn attention to this problem. She has given examples of Homi Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai who built institutions around people rather than around programmes. The institutions can hope to develop and grow only if they are able to attract and retain creative persons, as well as are able to stimulate creativity amongst people working in such institutions. This can be achieved if the goals of the individuals working in the institute

and institutional goals converge a great deal. Such convergence is possible if programmes are designed in the light of the special expertise available, and people working together help to define the special character of the institute. Unfortunately, ⁱⁿ the fields which are made popular by some well known and effective institutions, there is a tendency for other institutions to quickly come up and take advantage of the popular demand having been created by the effective institutions. The temptation is then to utilise the high demand by quickly organising the programmes and swing into action rather than waiting and investing time and other resources in getting and building people. Experience has shown that this expediency in institutional development may not lead to institution building, but may, in the long run, result in stagnation. Such an institute lives in a borrowed framework, and responds to the needs solely projected from outside rather than to the needs which are developed on the basis of a survey of the market and assessment of internal expertise and strength of the people working in the institution.

Proposition 4: If enough trust is not put in people working in an institution, and they are not given enough autonomy to work, institution building will suffer.

Management of the groups of creative people is an extremely difficult job. Creativity needs some autonomy. Autonomy means that persons define their goals, have opportunity to contribute to the development of the system of management of the institution, and have enough flexibility both to pursue their individual special interests, as well as work as members of various teams in the institution. Such creative autonomy is extremely important for the sustained development of an institution. This is possible if there is a climate of trust in the institution, people at various levels having trust in the ability, competence, and integrity of people. Such a climate has a multiplying effect; people come up to the expectations and become more trustworthy, which in turn may generate higher trust amongst people. An institute which contributes through various measures to the building of such an upward spiral of trust is able to develop highly creative teams of workers. On the other hand, institutions which rely more on rules and regulations to ensure uniformity and achieving clearer responsibilities are not able to develop creative individuals or creative teams. Similarly, the institutions which lay down things very clearly, and merely expect the individuals to conform to laid out plans, may not be able to generate process of institution building. Autonomy should not be misunderstood to mean complete freedom to individuals. Agreeing on the general framework, and then putting demands on individuals and groups

working in an institution for high performance, would be necessary for achieving results as well as for ensuring creativity. Autonomy is necessary in the sense of helping individuals determine the goals, tolerating some amount of diversity and non-conformity, and encouraging experimentation, with risk taking to some extent. Without this kind of autonomy, creativity suffers and the process of institution building gets set back even in the beginning.

Structure

The structure of the institution is extremely important. The structure determines to a great extent how the institution will develop its resources. The structure will also be able to sustain the culture which is being created in the institution. Four propositions are offered in this connection.

Proposition 5: If enough attention is paid to the process in the beginning of the institution's life, less attention will be needed to it, and enough time will be available to work on substantive aspects of the institutional work; on the other hand, if very little attention is given to the process in the early life of the institute, more time will be wasted in process matters.

It is very important that the structure stabilizes slowly in an institution. The eagerness to provide detailed structure to the institute from the very beginning, and lay down everything in detail, does not help in the long term. Early attention to detailed

structure of an institute is likely to distract attention from the major problems of process which may be extremely important for institution building. It is an irony that eagerness to stabilize structure too early in the institution life goes against the health of the structure in the long run. It may be useful to structure the institute to the minimum in the beginning, and a lot of attention should be paid to the process. The processes would include, for example, how people work, how the traditions are being set up in the institute, how goals are set, the way people feel about the institute and the programmes, various procedures and their perception by different members. Questions should be openly discussed about the programmes, and various other aspects of the institution. Any differences, conflicts, dissatisfaction, and even tensions may be shared openly, and alternative way of dealing with them may be discussed. Such attention to the process in the beginning would free the institute from attending to these questions later on; attention to these matters may become a routine, not requiring much energy on the part of the leader and other members of the institute. It is therefore in the interest of institution building that the deliberate attention is paid to the process in the early part of its life and the structure is stabilized slowly.

Proposition 6: The matrix organisation may be most suitable for institution building.

The experience has shown that matrix type of organisation is much more suitable for institute building processes. Matrix type structure of an organization involves people functioning across the disciplines and other specialisations. In the matrix system people play several roles, they may take some roles in the vertical position, and some at the horizontal level. For example, an individual may belong to a particular discipline, he may do teaching, research and consulting, and at the same time he may take responsibility for some activity in the institute. In order to prepare a matrix structure of the institute, the various functions of the institute may be divided into several groups, and individuals may be encouraged to volunteer for membership in the various groups. For example, in a teaching and research institution, the various possible groups may be according to disciplines, the major activities of the institute (like admission, placement, student counselling, outside activities, etc.), major functions (like teaching, research, extension work, etc.). By taking more than one role members may be able to share several experiences, and bring the experience of one role for the benefit of other roles. On the other hand, an institution which is structured according to specific fields, or specific functions, - and people belong only to

those and do not participate in other functions - in the long term deprives itself and its members from mutual learning empathic relationships.

Proposition 7: An institution which establishes necessary mechanisms to foster and stabilize the tradition and culture is able to build itself in a better way.

Although attention to the process and establishment of culture is important in the beginning of the institute, mechanisms to establish and stabilize these such traditions may be necessary. For example, in order to establish the tradition of respecting for the various roles without paying undue attention to the hierarchy and seniority, it may be useful to establish a mechanism of selecting people for the various functions for a given period of time, based on their expertise, availability, and even comparative juniority in the hierarchy. Similarly, the mechanism of temporary roles (giving responsibility for a period of time, rather than permanent appointments for them) may be able to establish a culture of mutuality and collaboration. In an institution tenure (long term or permanent appointment) on the senior roles like headship of units, or chairmanship of various functions, or of the major activities may go against the institutions building process. It may be useful to be clear about the type of tradition and culture which the institution would like to build. And then necessary attention may be paid to the mechanisms which may establish such tradition and culture, and may be able to stabilise these.

Proposition 8: An institution which builds linkages with its major client systems has more chances of healthy growth.

An institution survives only to the extent to which it is able to get the support of the client system to which it is catering. It is, therefore, necessary that the institution functions in close contacts with the client system. If an institute works by itself in the belief that it knows what the needs of the client systems are, and tries to meet these needs without checking with the client systems, it may grow in isolation, and in the long term its effectiveness will be lost. It is necessary for an institution to pay attention and actively establish linkages with the client systems. One way to ensure such linkages is to have a major representation of the client system in its executive body. Linkages can also be established by inviting members of the client system from time to time to review and react to the various programs the institution is organising for the client systems. Another way to build linkages is to have a free flow from the client system to the institute and vice versa. For example, in a university which is catering to the rural community it may be useful to use capable progressive farmers, or efficient artisans, who possess expert knowledge about their occupations and the community, by inviting them to share their experiences as experts, and even participate in some activities of the university.

An institute of management may send its faculty to the various organisations like industry, or public systems, or voluntary organisations, for a brief period of time to undertake specific work, and learn from that experience. Similarly, it may selectively encourage persons from outside organisations like practising managers and the administrators to come and spend sometime in the institute both for teaching as well as developing various other programmes. If a school system in the rural area is able to utilise members of the community for supervision, building the strengths of the schools, and for necessary help even in teaching it may be able to influence the community much more than the system which thinks that it has all the necessary expertise and ideas for changing the community by working out the plans and diffusing ideas.

Culture

The culture of an institution is extremely important. It is only the proper culture which is able to sustain an institution in the long term. Each institution has a distinct personality, and this is reflected in what kind of culture or traditions it is able to build. The institution strives to develop the uniqueness in terms of such traditions and cultures. It may be very useful to pay attention to how the culture and the traditions develops. Four propositions are offered in this connection.

Proposition 9: Sharing of common experience and developing some homogeneity of thinking by the various members of an institute in its early life would help in the institution building process

Although an institute benefits from the heterogeneous experience which the various members bring to it, some common experience and common understanding among the early members helps in focussing on the objectives of the institute. This may either be achieved in terms of the common ideology which members have in the beginning, or through organisations of a common experience which may help them to share the same values, the same understanding, and may bring about the necessary commitment for the development of the institute. Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad achieved this by organising a programme for all the members of the faculty, who joined the institute in the beginning, to go to the Harvard Business School for common orientation to and understanding of one method of teaching, i.e. the case method. This helped in building a homogeneous team. It also helped them to develop some basic and common understanding and conceptualisation. It is not suggested that such a common experience be provided by sending people abroad. Some mechanism should be used for providing some common basis for people to come together, and focus their attention

very sharply on the major aspects of the institute.

In institutions which have developed and played crucial role in the country, a common ideological basis has been very evident. However, in the later phases of the institution building, such ideological sharing and homogeneity may become a problem in the process of institution building. While having some common ground on which people stand together in the beginning, both in terms of the ideology and a common understanding of the thrust of the institute, as well as the ways of achieving the goals, may be helpful, if earlier members begin to demand a price of conformity to the ideology, or to the general structure and methodology of the institute, from the new members who join it in the later years, the institution building processes will be over. Homogeneity is helpful at one stage, but may become a handicap and limitation at another stage of its development.

Proposition 10: Mechanisms of establishing a balance between autonomy of individual members and their collaboration for common goals helps in the institution building process.

It may sound very contradictory that both autonomy and individual members as well as their collaboration for various tasks are important, but a combination of the two is necessary for institution building. If the institute demands conformity to its various goals or to the ways of achieving the goals, or to its

structure and mechanism, the institute cannot make an impact. There should be enough freedom to individuals to try different methods and to be able to develop creative ways of meeting the goals of the institute. However, the institute should also develop mechanisms for promoting collaboration on various tasks among its members. The culture of the institute should encourage experimentation and creativity, but it should also encourage mutual respect and working together in teams. This is one of the main problems in many institutions. When enough autonomy and freedom is provided, a culture of individualism and exclusive existence by members of the faculty develops. This is particular true if the institute employs people with higher intellectual ability and competence. The danger of professional isolation, and isolated endeavour, is much more amongst intellectuals and people of high ability. Matrix structure of the institute may help a great deal in developing collaboration. Also, if teams are formed for working on various tasks, deliberately encouraging people from various backgrounds and disciplines to join such teams, this may help in building a culture of mutuality and collaboration the process of building a common thrust of the institute suffers.

Proposition 11: A delicate balance between the autonomy of the institute and its strong linkages with and support from outside may help in the institution building process.

While it is necessary to protect the institute from outside control

and undue influence, the institute should get the necessary support from outside as well as keep its doors open to healthy external ideas and influences. This is necessary specially in the beginning of the institute's life. If in the beginning the institute in its eagerness to get financial and other types of support does not pay enough attention to the development of its autonomy, and does not protect itself from the outside influence, it may soon find itself only playing the tune to the music being provided from somewhere else. This may not help in institutional building. Various ways should be adopted to assert the autonomy of the institute in determining its goals, developing its mechanisms, developing its culture, preparing its programme, and structuring its system. The institute may deliberate on the various existing practices available from other sources, and adopt what it thinks are useful. It may also develop its own tradition, culture and various practices and mechanisms which may be quite innovative. When such practices are being developed, these may be seen as a threat to the existing cultures prevailing in similar other systems. And there may be a great pressure for conformity to those prevalent practices. The main task the institute faces at this stage is that of survival as a distinct organisation to make an impact on the society. An institute may adopt various ways of staying away such influences. However, it does not mean that it has to work in isolation. The institute, at the same time, should get

enough support from the various agencies and client systems which are likely to be critical to the continued meaningful life of the institute. In fact, these very agencies and client systems can be used in protecting the autonomy of the institute. They can be involved in understanding and appreciating what the institute is trying to achieve. And then they can play an important role in ensuring the autonomy of the institute to play such a role.

Proposition 12: The process of self-renewal throughout the life of the institution ensures institution building.

The process of institution building very depends on how open the culture of the institute is. When members in the institute are given freedom to work, and the culture encourages discussion on the main policies, and raising questions to search better solutions to the problems, the institution becomes stronger. The value of raising questions, openly sharing the concerns, and taking steps to examine the issues involved should be stressed. Sometime institutions which are highly successful, become closed to new possibilities and discourage questions on the policy and practices. The more established and successful an institution is, the greater the temptation it has to close itself to new ideas. In order to avoid this danger it is necessary that enough attention is paid to the development of various processes of self-renewal. The institution should deliberately take steps to encourage various points of view and ensure that the

process of curiosity and enquiry continues throughout the life of the institute. Those who have different points of view to express and new ideas to suggest should be encouraged. Such a process of self-renewal in the long run helps institution building processes.

Leadership

There is no need to state that leadership is extremely important for institution building. This is particularly so in India where the top leadership provides the necessary conditions for proper growth for the institution. Leadership is also important because it establishes the necessary culture in the institute and may be able to help the institute become self-sufficient and independent. In the beginning of the institute's life leadership plays a very crucial role. We have the largest number of propositions in this area.

Proposition 13: If the leader of the institute is able to devote full attention and time for the institute, he will be able to contribute the maximum to its development.

This proposition may seem to be so obvious that it hardly needs to be stated. However, the reason to state this proposition is to discuss its implications. If the leader looks for something else while he is heading an institution, he does not give enough importance to the institute. There have been many instances of people heading an institution only as an interim measure, and looking for some other

opportunities, using the institution role as only a stepping stone to some higher position. This attitude of the leader lowers the status of the institute, and becomes a handicap. Moreover, if the leader has too many other outside commitments, and is not able to devote full time and attention to the institute, especially in the beginning of its life, various processes which need to be established for the proper growth of the institute. are neglected. Institutions have broken down even in the beginning of their life because the heads of / ^{these} institutions had too many demands on his time from outside, ^{not} and were/able to spend much time on the institution itself. It is extremely important that the leader is fully involved and occupied in the institute, specially in the beginning of its life.

Proposition 14: A non-competitive leader helps in the process of institution building.

Some recent interesting findings by McClelland (1976) have implications for institution building. McClelland has found that a person who has very high achievement motivation (i.e. has a high need for competition and for personal excellence) become a good institution builder. An institution needs a non-competitive leader, a leader who takes pride in the development of his people, and who does not feel threatened by the achievement of his colleagues. Such a leader can contribute to the development of the institute much more. While a person heads an institution he has to take a firm decision

as to what particular role he will mainly be playing. If he wants to continue to have the professional academic role, and in the process feels competitive with his colleagues who are primarily in that role, he may not be able to build the institute properly. It is not suggested that the leader does not do any academic or professional work. However, as long as he heads the institution, his primary role should be to build the institution, provide opportunities for professional growth, development, and fulfilment to his colleagues, and take pride in their achievement. One who is able to play up his colleagues and present them as the most competent people who deserve appreciation, is able to build strong team and contribute to the process of institution building. In McClelland's terminology the leader should be at stage four of power motivation, the stage at which the concerns of the self are minimised, and the main concern is to build the organisation by using resources which are already available with the people who are working in the organisation. Through such a concern the leader is able to influence much more than through directly influencing and determining affairs in the institute.

Proposition 15: The leader who respects the roles of members of the institute and provides autonomy to them to function contributes to effective institution building process.

It is extremely important how the leader administers the institution. The general tendency of the leader may be either to control the

various functions of the institution by monitoring everything, or by establishing a small group of people around him who may be able to help him understand how the institute is working, and help him take most decisions. Such a leader may not be able to build the institution. He gives messages of not respecting the roles. Once a person is assigned a particular role, the leader should respect decisions taken by that person in that role. In fact, he should discipline himself in not interfering in that role and not become unduly concerned with how that role is being performed. Although he can and should review from time to time with the concerned persons their performance in their roles, he should encourage the role occupants to take the decisions themselves and not bring up matters either for routine information or for too much advice. By this kind of behaviour the leader communicates respect for the roles as well as trust in his people that they can perform the roles quite effectively and that they would not need much guidance. The leader who is unduly concerned, and wants to understand and control everything, in the long run kills the vital aspects of institution building, and people begin to pass on everything to him. Self-sustaining institutions which may become strong enough to function effectively by themselves, even in the absence of the formal leaders, can be built only by those leaders who help various members of their institutions to take their roles seriously and do what is important for those roles. Of course, the various persons occupying the roles

should be held responsible for the results to be achieved. But mistakes may be discussed and used for future learning, and people should be encouraged to try experiments, necessarily in the process of experimenting make some mistakes, but learn fast to become more effective and achieve better success.

Proposition 16: Institution building is facilitated if the leader of an institute is to establish linkages and to attend to the external affairs of the institute.

The leader of the institute performs several roles. He helps to build linkages of the institute with various significant systems, like the grant giving systems, outside agencies of similar nature, the client system, foreign universities or institutions, other donor agencies which are likely to take interest in the development of the institute, etc. This external affairs function is a very important function for institution building. If the institute is able to establish strong links with various systems, its image is strongly projected, and it has very good chances of stabilization as well as for continued growth. There is also an accidental advantage if the leaders takes the external affairs role seriously. If he pays more attention to external affairs, he will leave a lot of matters to be dealt with by his colleagues who share different roles in the institute. Also an institute needs various kind of support from outside. It needs funds; it needs various inputs;

it needs support for its programmes in terms of more demands from the client system; and it needs support in terms of its recognition as an important institution doing unique work and making significant contribution, for the society. Such supports may be available if the leader of the institute establishing strong linkages with relevant agencies and organisations, and is seen as a reference person who could be approached for any help the institute can provide to the community and other systems.

Proposition 17: A leader who is prepared to change and learn contributes a great deal to institution building processes.

The head of an institution plays a very vital role, and establishes several traditions in the institute. Being the leader he also models behaviour. People follow his examples, and they learn much more from his behaviour than from what he says. In order to establish good traditions in the institute it may be useful for him to provide opportunities for people to critique his own behaviour and practices, and he should listen with patience and care to what is being said about his behaviour and other aspects of the institute. He should also regularly reflect regularly on what he has been doing and with what impact. In the process of reflection the leader may be able to analyse the alternatives which were available, or which he did not think of at the particular moment but could be explored, and see how

his decision could improve in future. In such a dual process of establishing the mechanism for feedback and critiquing, as well as monitoring mechanism for reflection and analysis the leader is able to continue to learn and change. Only a person with high self-respect and self-confidence is able to learn and change.

Proposition 18: The most crucial test of institution building is to what extent a leader is able to dispossess the institute which he is able to build up.

The last proposition in this series is the most important. Most institutes in India have suffered and have stagnated because the leader who successfully established the institution was not able to dispossess it. It is a great pity that many of those who establish an institute, and are able to contribute to its effectiveness, think of themselves as the owners of the institute, and its culture of traditions. Therefore, they continue to determine the direction in which the institute should go. After sometime the leader should learn how to get out of the role of leadership and help some other person to take the role of leading the institute in the future. While it is important for the leader to own up the results and be responsible for these, it is equally important that he learns how to dis-possess the institute. The process of dispossession is the most difficult and perhaps the most painful one. One who establishes and leads an institute finds it difficult to resist the temptation to

"save" the institute from going into a different direction. And the person may continue to determine the direction and working of the institute even after he formally leaves the institution and the role of the chief executive. There are examples of institutions which have stagnated because those who headed the institute refused to leave their positions even after they have had formally severed their relations with the institute. In many cases they continue to determine the affairs of their institutions even after they are dead. One rare example of such dispossession is that of Ravi Matthai who headed the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. Although he had done marvellous work in establishing and building up that institute as the strong one, after about 7 years he felt that time had come for somebody else to take the leadership role. He handed over the leadership to another colleague, continued in the Institute, and refrained from influencing the decisions. This deep self-respect, only out of which the capability of dispossession develops, contributes to the process of institution building. This does not mean that the person ceases to contribute. However, his contribution is in different ways, and he does not influence unduly what happens in the institution. One of the important things for a leader^{is} to develop this capability. It may be worthwhile to design special programmes to help people learn the process of dispossession.

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