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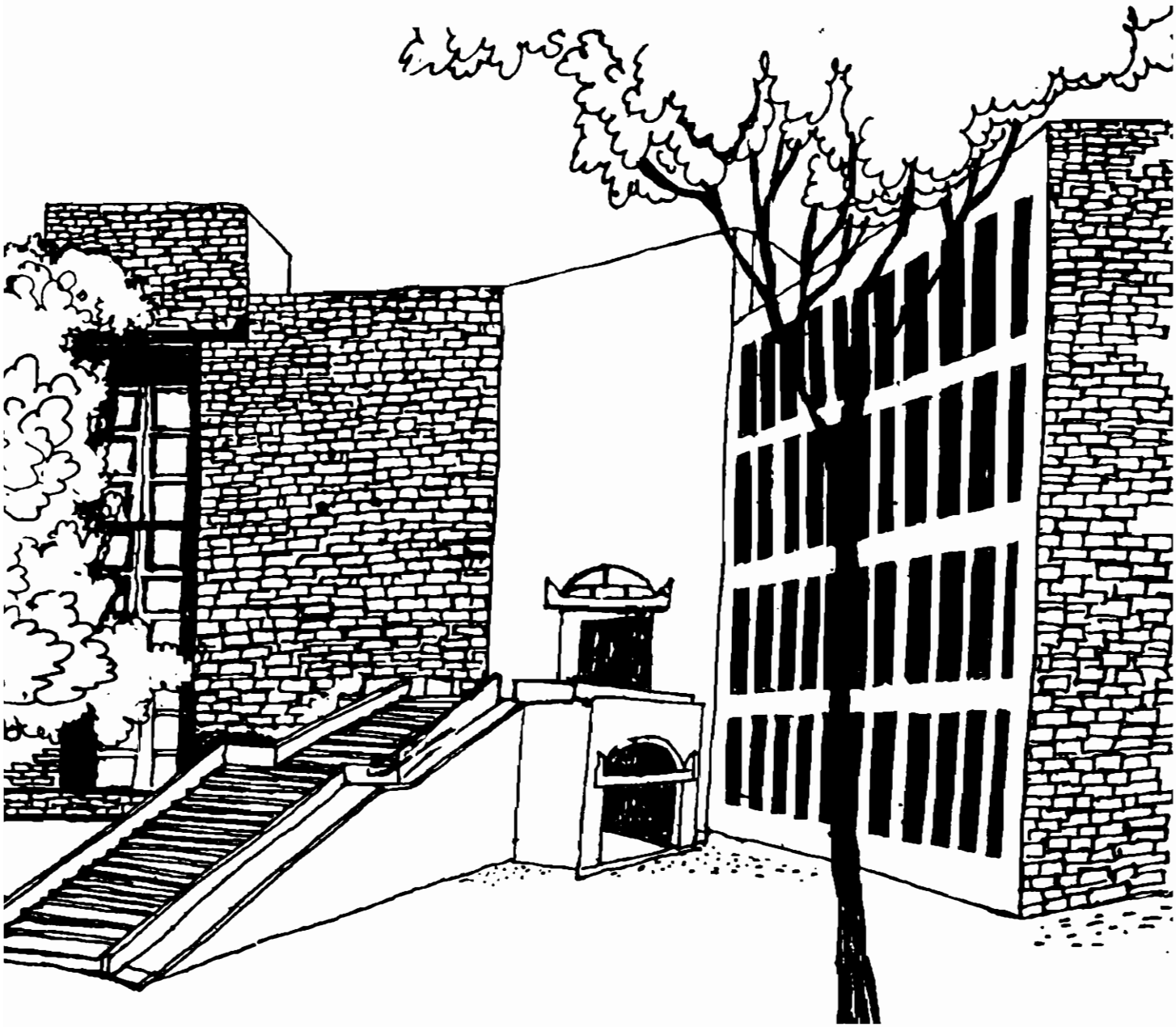

INSTITUTION BUILDING AND SELF RENEWAL NEEDS OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS

By

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INSTITUTION BUILDING AND SELF RENEWAL NEEDS OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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Abstract

A large number of educational institutions have become static, rigid, complacent and change-resistant. This is because they have not paid adequate attention to their own internal culture, values and processes from the beginning of their existence. They have also not established any mechanisms for self-renewal or competency development HRD of their staff. This paper attempts to highlight the need for institutionalising various processes and mechanisms that may make educational institutions more dynamic, purposeful, cost-effective and effective. Paying attention to goals, values and institutional culture; conducting self-renewal exercises periodically; paying attention to internal HRD; enhancing accountability through individual activity plans, performance appraisals and participant evaluation procedures; establishing and renewing environmental linkages and having courage to liquidate defunct units and departments are some of the ways in which education systems can be strengthened and made effective. The paper also presents a check-list of institution building and self-renewal capabilities of educational institutions.

INSTITUTION BUILDING AND SELF RENEWAL NEEDS OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS*

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Educational institutions form an important base for educational systems. Educational institutions are organizations that work with service motives and superordinate goals. They are expected to serve people by developing their knowledge, skills, personality including their values and attitudes. They are expected to influence the environment through the people they develop and through the models they set up in terms of the values and behaviour of people who work in these institutions. Institution Building is a continuous process by which the educational institutions are able to build and strengthen an internal culture and values that facilitate a dynamic functioning of the institution so that it is able to achieve its objectives and have the right kind of an impact on the environment. If this process is strong the educational institution is able to be constantly sensitive to the community and the environment it is expected to serve; periodically keep sharpening and clarifying its goals through defining and redefining them, examine its impact through a process of feedback from the variety of its constituents, review its internal functioning and keep changing it or renewing it to be effective.

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Thus an educational institution with a strong institution building base is never static and is ever changing. A large number of educational institutions today have not learnt to change. They have become static, rigid, complacent and have learnt to resist change rather than to change and bring about change in the surroundings. Those that are changing are changing out of compulsion and necessity rather than out of their own initiation and pro-action. This is because most educational institutions have no strong institution-building base. They have not paid attention at the time of their coming into existence to their own internal processes and culture (including values and norms). They have established no mechanisms to review themselves through a review of their own processes and impact. They also have no mechanisms to promote the continuous development of their staff through planned Human Resource Development activities. They have not paid attention to ensuring adequately the accountability and at the same time creativity and innovations by their staff. A number of educational institutions even today do not have appropriate performance appraisal systems to ensure accountability or training policies and budgets to facilitate development.

This paper attempts to highlight the need for institutionalising various processes and mechanisms that may make educational institutions more dynamic, purposeful, cost-effective and effective. Although the focus of this paper is on educational institutions, the observations made in this paper can be extended to larger educational systems.

Shared Goals, Values and Institutional Culture

Every institution should be very clear about its goals, values and norms. The goals of the institution should be both in terms of outcomes and processes. The outcome goals deal with what the institution is finally expected to accomplish and the process goals should deal with what the institution values as the means to be used for accomplishing these. Both these sets of goals should be shared widely and should constantly guide all the staff. It is not enough for the elite class of the staff (the teaching and research staff) of the institution to be aware of these goals. It is important for everyone working in the institution in any capacity to know what the institution stands for and get committed to it. Most institutions take for granted that all their staff know the goals of the institution. The human memory is limited and the mind tends to substitute "means" for "ends" and procedures and mechanics may override the impact goals. A good institution therefore, undertakes periodic exercises of reminding and recapitulating the goals of the institution and promoting their internalisation. These exercises may take the form of annual reviews that precede the annual institutional planning exercises or may take the form of special workshops to examine the institutional processes and their impact or self-renewal exercises requiring the institution to set new directions for itself etc.

The institutions also should clearly state what the institution values and the norms every member is expected to follow. These values and norms should be widely shared, the head of the insti-

tution and the senior staff setting personal example by following these values and norms.

The values and norms define in a way the culture of the institution. The culture may deal with various aspects of the organizational life including the way activities are planned, how much participation is valued, decision-making processes, rewards and sanctions, management of mistakes, collaborative attitudes and team spirit, openness, trust, extent to which staff are encouraged to take initiative and be creative, autonomy and mutual respect, commitment to work and work culture etc.

Along with discussing and internalising institutional goals, the institution should also make efforts to develop its own culture and keep strengthening it. Every institution should be known by its own culture and values. This will give a lot of strength to all the staff working in it.

Conducting Self-renewal Exercises

Every institution starts aging after a period of time. Some institutions age faster than others. A few institutions get crippled from the beginning or sometime in the course of their functioning. Every institution, irrespective of how well it has done or is doing requires periodic check-ups and renewal exercises. Such renewal exercises help in identifying problem areas and taking corrective action. In addition institutional renewal exercises may inject new spirit into the organizations.

Such renewal exercises should use a participative method. Either internal teams or external teams or mixed teams should be constituted in the form of task forces, committees or working groups. These teams should conduct diagnostic surveys to diagnose the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the institution. The various constituent groups like students, alumni, parents, faculty, staff, management committee members, representatives of community the institution serves, donors etc., should be interviewed and their assessment and suggestions collected. After such researching and data collection the teams may prepare a report identifying new directions, improvements and so on. These reports may form the basis of a renewal workshop, where decisions for change, improvements and new directions are taken and implemented. Such workshops and renewal exercises could be conducted if necessary, with the help of external facilitators with competence in process facilitation skills.

As a result of such exercises the institution should be willing to discontinue some of its activities which outlived their utility and start new activities through which the institution may be able to serve its client groups better or achieve its objectives better.

Participation of all the staff in some way or the other is very critical for a spirited implementation of change.

Some of the strategic institutions that have proved to be good successes upto a point of time in some countries have gotten into a groove and are unwilling to change themselves even when their

environment has changed, client groups and their expectations changed. Thus success at some time may set also a direction for failure unless self-renewal activities are undertaken by the institution.

Institutional health or organizational climate surveys may be conducted to diagnose the internal health of the institution. Data from such surveys may indicate areas for internal improvements and strengthening of institutions. Organizational health is reflected in the satisfaction levels of the members on a number of dimensions of the institution like leadership, team work, decision-making, communications, welfare etc.

Instituting HRD Systems or Mechanisms

Educational institutions are so busy with their task of educating others, they often tend to forget their own education. With the fast changing technologies, changing environment and the changing world members of educational institutions should constantly update their knowledge, sharpen their methods and keep improving their skills. Unfortunately, most educational institutions tend to neglect the development of their own faculty and staff. This is indicated by the fact that universities and other large educational institutions do not have HRD departments to look after the development of their members. Several of them do not even have continuing education programmes or even training budgets to train their faculty. A few institutions that have "continuing education" departments provide such continuing education programmes to those outside the university or institution and not to the staff

of the institution.

For effective management and institution building educational institutions should establish some formal mechanisms to ensure continuous development of their staff. These may take the form of staff development committees, or departments/cells of internal HRD or HRD task forces and the like. These groups/ departments/committees should have budgets of their own and such budgets as well as activities should form an important part of the annual institutional plans. These departments/ groups/committees should constantly survey the development needs of the institutional staff and ensure that opportunities are provided to them. Every institution, howsoever small it may be, should have a mechanism of internal human resource development as well as an HRD budget.

Internal seminars, workshops, faculty development programmes, field trips, training programmes and other forms of learning activities should be undertaken.

Enhancing Accountability and Development Through Performance Appraisals and Activity Plans

Educational institutions in some countries are required to undertake annual institutional planning exercise. While this is a useful management practice, if it is not preceded by individual activity plans and collective annual reviews, its effectiveness gets limited. For effective institutional management, every member of the institution and particularly the academic staff should be required to plan his activities annually review the

previous years' activities and use such activity planning and reviews as a mechanism of self-development. These plans and reviews could be shared in groups and institutional plans and reviews may also emerge out of these.

The performance of every staff member should be appraised annually with a good degree of weightage given to self-appraisals. Such performance appraisals should take into account the evaluation and feedback by students and other client groups and should suggest developmental needs of the member and therefore, linked to HRD activities of the institution. In some educational institutions student evaluation of faculty are openly publicised in the institution and serve as sources of ensuring accountability and motivation.

Establishing and Renewing Environmental Linkages

Most educational institutions like the primary and secondary schools and adult education centres have permanent physical structures. Due to heavy demand on these systems students/learners come to these institutions in large numbers and the institution need not make any effort to go to the learners or potential learners. Over a period of time educational institutions may develop strong boundaries and may end up serving certain types of clients knowingly or unknowingly. In some case the institution may not even realise the change in the profile of the leaners.

An educational institution that has strong boundaries ceases to be an effective institution as it is not sensitive to the changing needs of its learners and the environment. In order to avoid

such dangers every educational institution should develop mechanisms by which its members interact with the environment periodically and be alive to their needs. This may be in the form of open sessions with alumni and other client groups community need surveys, environmental linkage workshops, community involvement workshops, public service days where the institutional members visit the community members and talk to them and so on.

Establishing Short Life Institutions and Liquidating Defunct Institutions

In most of the countries once an institution is established to serve certain needs even when the needs are fulfilled the institutions continue to exist. Thus today there are several educational institutions that have very little utility and they continue to exist for political reasons or for difficulties in closing. The education systems should take bold steps in liquidating institutions that have become defunct and that have outlived their utility. The human resources in these institutions could be utilised for other useful purposes.

The education world should develop a new culture of developing short life institutions that involve very little infrastructural expenditures. Adult education, non-formal education, open universities, continuing education centres etc., provide excellent opportunities for establishing such short-life institutions. The short-life institutions should be planned for a specific time period (e.g., five years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years) and it should be known from the beginning that the institution will

cease to exist at the end of the specified period. Everything should be planned from the beginning with this in mind. Such self-liquidating culture in education systems may foster effectiveness in education.

Summary

In sum, effective management of education systems depend to a large extent on effective management of its constituent institutions and in developing proper culture and self-renewing capabilities. Paying attention to goals, values and institutional culture, conducting self-renewal exercises periodically, paying attention to internal HRD, enhancing accountability through individual activity plans, performance appraisals and participant evaluation procedures, establishing and renewing environmental linkages, and having courage to liquidate defunct units and departments are some of the ways in which education systems can be strengthened and made effective.

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Appendix

Check-list of Institution Building and Self-renewal Abilities of Educational Institutions

The check-list may be used to assess the institution-building self-renewal capability o any educational institute, centre system.

Goals and Mission

1. Does the institution have clearly defined goals and objectives?

2. Are these goals widely known and accepted by the staff of the institution?

3. Do these goals emphasize service and doing good to larger community, society or country? (Are there any superordinate goals among these?)

4. Is there a clear statement of the mission of the institution?

5. Is the mission statement known to all employees of the institution and is widely shared in the institution?

6. Does the institution make efforts to review its goals and objectives and sharpen them periodically (or at least once in a while)?

Values and Norms

7. Does the institution have clearly stated values?

8. Are the values widely known and shared by all staff?

9. Does the institution make special effort through its recruitment, induction, training and internal management processes to ensure practice and internalisation of these values?

10. Does the institute has its own norms and culture?

11. Are the staff aware of these norms?

12. Do the staff attempt to adhere to these?

13. Is there something distinct about the culture of the institution?

14. Do the staff feel proud of their institutional culture?

Self-renewal Exercises

15. Does the institution conduct internal review exercises periodically?

16. Do these exercises attempt to make a sincere diagnosis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the institution?

17. Are all staff consulted in these exercises?

18. Do the staff take these exercises seriously?

19. Are there any activities discontinued as a result of renewal exercises?

20. Are there any new activities added as a result of these exercises?

21. Are there any new processes and procedures and internal management systems established as a result of such renewal exercises?

22. Are there modifications made in the institutional processes as a result of these exercises

23. Are there organizational health surveys conducted?

24. Is the data from such surveys used to improve the institutional health?

HRD Systems

25. Is there any formal mechanism to facilitate the continuous learning and development of staff (e.g., HRD Department, training budget, HRD task force etc.)?

26. Is there any budget allocated for faculty development?

27. Is there any budget allocated for developing non-academic staff?

28. Are the employees sponsored for training programmes outside?

29. Are there internal seminars, workshops and training programmes conducted for the development of academic/non-academic staff?

30. Do the staff take active interest in acquiring new knowledge and skills and thus develop themselves?

Activity Plans and Performance Appraisals

31. Does the institution prepare annual plans?

32. Are the staff involved in these plans?

33. Are these plans widely shared?

34. Are these plans reviewed and lessons used for improving the planning process?

35. Are the academic staff required to prepare their individual activity plans every year?

36. Is there an appraisal system to review the performance of each individual staff member?

37. Does the appraisal system encourage self-review and assessment?

38. Is there a system of the students and other clients assessing the performance of academic staff?

39. Does the internal or external client assessment form a part of performance appraisals of staff?

40. Are the appraisals linked to development activities?

Environmental Linkages

41. Does the institution have mechanisms to be in touch with its client system?

42. Does the institution actively promote its members to interact with the community it is supposed to serve?

43. Does the institution encourage the members of the community to visit it and give feedback or share expectations?

44. Is the institution sensitive to the changing needs of the society?

Self-liquidation and Temporary Systems

45. Has the institution closed down any of its units or activities that have ceased to exist?

46. Does the institution have the internal strength to change completely its course of action and give birth to a whole set of new activities if needed?

47. Does the institution use temporary structures and systems?

48. Are there any units/structures/departments/procedures in the institution that have outlived their utility?

49. Do people have a sense of pride in belonging to this institution?

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