

WP : 233

# Working Paper

WP233



WP

1978

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MANAGEMENT TRAINING FOR MUNICIPAL  
ADMINISTRATION

by

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W P No. 233  
Aug. 1978

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of the IIMA is to help faculty members  
to test out their research findings  
at the pre-publication stage.

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## MANAGEMENT TRAINING FOR MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION

That problems of urban life in India are increasing in number, variety and complexity is a universally accepted fact. It is also widely recognized that municipal administrations which manage urban affairs are woefully lacking in their capacity to cope with these problems.

Studies after studies and reports after reports have mentioned the awful state of the municipal affairs. Lately many different suggestions have been put forward to improve the management of urban affairs. These include changing the structures of municipalities and corporations partly or wholly; constitution of separate urban authorities unconnected with the existing municipal set up. These authorities are being set up mainly for developmental functions on the ground that existing municipal corporations are not capable of carrying out speedy developments which has become prominent. Also, though rarely mentioned publicly, the idea is to keep urban development immune from political influence. It is doubtful that setting up of these authorities has proved to be a more effective way of dealing with the urban problems. Moreover, ideologically these authorities although there is considerable informal association and interference of politicians, are removed from the principle of self-government and democratic decentralization. It is worth questioning whether setting

up of separate urban development authorities are administratively or ideologically desirable.

One way may be to strengthen and vitalize the existing municipal authorities. Among variety of things that need to be done, one very important, is the improvement of municipal administrations. Towards that end some attempts are recently being made to give training in modern management to municipal officers.

Among all government services, municipal services have suffered most. Local government structures in rural areas because they have been organically linked with state governments have always acknowledged the need and value of training. Among non-developmental local government services like revenue almost all important functionaries - often down to Tehsildars, Circle Inspectors and even village accountants were made to take examinations and undergo a period of training. Similarly, after India launched its rural development programmes all important developmental functionaries were made to undergo some training, however, traditional and inadequate.

Municipal employees have been rarely made to undergo any training by their organizations. The need for training is obvious not only because of the reasons discussed above but also because of the fact that both structurally and functionally municipal organizations continue to be based on traditional patterns. Moreover municipal

services rarely attract talented people as their status, jobwise and remuneration wise has always been low. In a recent study I conducted of a Municipal Corporation, I found that more than 80 per cent of the municipal officers belonging to Class I and II cadres expressed the desire to trade their municipal jobs for a job of equal status and salary in any other organization. Municipal jobs have not been considered attractive generally.

It is for all these reasons that a systematic, rigorous management training programme becomes all the more necessary.

Trainers and training organizations have by and large neglected the urban sphere of public management. For one thing training in public management is a very recent activity for most institutions of management and administration and among host of other problems connected with education and training in public affairs, training in urban affairs is neglected because not much pay-off is seen.

Recently some effort is being made in the direction of the training of municipal officers in modern management. There have been some, though very few corporations and municipalities that have themselves taken initiative in this regard. The municipal corporation that I have studied, organized on its own initiative a training

programme for all its departmental heads and other important officers. The then Commissioner of the Corporation, an IAS officer of the state government, had invited an outside organization to arrange the training programme. Later on some of the officers and corporators helped to organize a short training programme for the chief-executives and presidents of the municipalities in the region. Thus even municipal authorities which are generally considered as very traditional in their outlook, are beginning to show some interest.

However, whatever little experience there is with management training in municipal affairs has been generally disappointing and unfruitful.

Among the reasons mentioned by the trainers are : (1) There is no desire for improvement among people who run municipal affairs (2) The Municipal organizations are so bad that nothing can be done with them. The best way is to keep them aside and think of managing urban affairs by developing other organizations (incidentally this also seems to be the official thinking at higher levels; hence the growth of independent urban authorities). (3) Among public organizations, the municipal administration would get low priority.

II

In what follows, I have tried, with the help of some empirical data collected from a municipal corporation to discuss some of the questions pertaining to the management training : 1) what are the attitudes of the corporation officers towards modern management concepts tools and techniques? 2) how receptive they are to the idea of training the municipal officers ? 3) what, according to them, are the chances of improvement and innovations in the municipal administration ? 4) what constraints and problems they see ? 5) how do they perceive the overall environment ? 6) what type of training it should be ? and 7) what kind of rethinking and preparation it would call for on the part of management consultants and educators ?

The study is a part of a larger research project\* that I carried out in this corporation which included besides a survey, indepth interviewing and few indepth case studies. While discussing the aspects of training I have used the knowledge and insights gained on the working of politics and government at municipal level, which in my opinion would have a bearing on the issue of training.

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\* A part of this project was sponsored and financed by the Public Systems Group of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

The sample of the larger study which included questions on the training consisted of all Class I & II officers of the corporation. The total number consisted of seventy-two officers but one had left the corporation before he could be interviewed so the effective sample covered 71 officers.

About 55 per cent of these officers had undergone some training in modern management. While 45 per cent had not undergone any formal training. This high percentage was due to the fact, mentioned earlier, that the commissioner had organized a short three day modern management orientation programme.

Unlike what I was told by some involved in training government municipal officers, the officers themselves do not have a negative response towards the various training programmes they had attended. Out of those who had undergone the training a very high percentage 92 responded very favourably to the experience of training and thought that what they had learned was something new and useful.

Moreover 85 percent of those who had undergone any training had tried to introduce some innovations in their departments. They all, however, reported that these innovations did not work and had to be given up soon.



Yet most officers had a positive and favourable orientation towards systematic modern management. They believed that the concepts, and tools of modern management had something important to offer and they could be very useful in managing municipal affairs. As Table-1 shows 77 per cent of all the officers - those who had undergone some training as well as those who had not undergone any training - did not agree with the statement that there was nothing new about modern management and that it was an old wine in a new bottle. Similarly 75 per cent disagreed with the statement that modern management is a western baby and therefore has no relevance for the Indian situation. Again 77 per cent disagreed with the view that all that is needed in government is not to try something new but make the existing structures and procedures work. The first three statements in table-1 reflect some general stock criticisms of modern management and its application to government. Our data shows that a very high majority of the corporation officials do not agree with these criticisms.

The fourth statement in table-1 expresses another wide spread belief that you can't do anything with government, that it is such a monster that it would devour anything that you throw at it. On this also the corporation officials felt that with will and determination it was possible to apply modern management procedures in the municipal corporations. Thus as against <sup>the</sup> common belief that the government officials are averse, if not hostile, to new

management applications, the municipal officers showed a very favourable attitude.

Table - 1

Perceptions about modern management and its applications in municipal bodies.

	Agree	Disagree	Other	Total *
1. There is nothing new about modern management. It is an old wine in a new bottle.	23	77	-	100% (71)
2. Modern management is not applicable in Indian situation. It may be OK for the western countries.	24	75	1	100% (71)
3. What is needed in corporation is not to apply anything new by way of management concepts and techniques but to make the existing system work properly.	21	77	2	100% (71)
4. In general, I believe that with determination and commitment modern management can be usefully applied in municipal corporations	80	20	-	100% (71)

### III

What then prevents municipal corporations from introducing modern management. There are several problems that seem to impede the useful application of modern management. And it is necessary that

\* In this and the subsequent tables base 'n' is reported in parentheses in the total's column. All other figures are percentages. Percentages are rounded off.

those who want to introduce scientific management and equip the municipal officers for better performance understand their problems, their limitations and their environment. Because then only they will be able to devise suitable strategies.

In subsequent tables we present data that will throw some light on those aspects which may help to understand the situation better.

Table-2 shows that any effort to change the situation cannot be adhoc, partial and cursory. If some administrative reforms are going to make any impact they must be large scale and wholistic. Most attempts at introducing management changes in government and at training officers have been adhoc and partial. Most training programmes tend to be partial or sectoral; majority of them are short term and usually they pick up only one or two officers from an organisation. This is done because it is not found easy to select <sup>the</sup> whole organization or department for introducing changes. It is coupled with the belief on the part of experts that one <sup>cannot</sup> ever think of changing the whole big bureaucratic structure. It is too big, too old, too well entrenched for any useful change.

But imagine just one officer, however senior and top ranking he may be, trying to change anything or introduce even a small innovation in his department where people, positions and

procedures are so highly stacked against departure from the accepted practices. As data in table-2 show a very high majority of the corporation officers believed that adhoc piecemeal changes will not produce desirable results. This belief is not entirely unjustified, nor it is an excuse for lack of willingness to push. As mentioned earlier those municipal officers who had undergone some training did try to introduce some changes but had found that they were not working.

There are other problems also. A single officer's attempts to introduce changes do not work because often his colleagues, superiors and subordinates feel both jealous and threatened. For any change, to work properly cooperation and acceptance by others become necessary but an isolated innovation in one department or at one particular level is bound to stir up things. An enthusiastic officer as revealed by the second statement in table-2 is likely to be met with such responses as "let him try, nothing will work here", "he is a new comer, he will soon realize and come back to his senses".

The trainers who select one or two government officers from different organizations assume that senior officers or heads of the departments have enough power and freedom to bring about changes if they really want to. Surprisingly the trainers also seem to accept (or at least do not want to question) the formal powers and position. Management experts should know better. As the third statement in table-2

shows as many as 82 per cent of officers agreed that even top level officials do not have as much powers as is commonly believed.

Table - 2

Perceived problems about management applications

	Agree	Disagree	Total
1. New management techniques cannot be applied by any one particular officer or at any one level. They will work only if they are applied in the organization as a whole.	92	8	100% (71)
2. If any enthusiastic officer tried to do something innovative other officers will resist and not cooperative.	79	21	100% (71)
3. In regard to management applications in government it should be remembered that even top level officials do not have as much power as is commonly believed.	82	18	100% (71)

IV

Among several constraints that top level officials face in improving their administration the two major constraints are the environmental and the political. In Table-3, data regarding the officers' perception of their environment are presented. During my indepth interviews and on the spot observations in the larger study, I had begun to realize that both officers and elected corporators were often very tense particularly when they were interacting with other officers, corporators and eminent or influential citizens. They

were generally very cautious and often on constant guard as to what they said or did. If in the evenings they went out to pay a social call to colleagues they would want to keep it a secret so that others would not know with whom they were chummy. Who went out with whom, in whose car was often meticulously noted and conclusions were drawn. Some of the officers and corporators with whom I had developed close relationships were very cautious when they visited me or invited me to visit them. Since I observed this as a very common phenomenon, I included some items in the survey to tap their perceptions of the environment in which they were working.

Two of these items, as presented in table-3 show that a good majority of officers perceive their environment to be highly tense. 77 per cent of the officers believed that the environment in local government organizations had deteriorated to such an extent that bad motives were attributed to anything you said or did. More than half of the officers also believed that their actions and movements were closely watched by people around them. Looking to the fact that both these statements were strongly worded and reflected extreme situations majority of the officers' agreement with them indeed shows the state of affairs. In such an environment any officer is likely to feel highly constrained about doing something new and unusual.

Another reason why their power and freedom are curtailed is the fact that the officers have to work with elected

corporators who are politicians. The Indian administrative structure are based on the classical British dichotomy between policy and implementation. This dichotomy is carried to its farthest degree in the organizational arrangements of the municipal corporations. The elected and the executive wings are visualized in the organizational arrangement as quite distinct and separate, and while there is some interdependence, formally at least, there is a high degree of

Table - 3

Perception of environment in municipal government

	Agree	Disagree	Other	Total
1. The environment in local government has deteriorated to such an extent that bad motives are attributed to everything you do or say e.g. corruption, flattery, playing politics, being secretive etc.,	77	20	3	100% (71)
2. The environment in local government organizations had deteriorated so much that your every move whom you met, where you went, who came to see you, why you attended or did not attend a particular meeting is closely watched by people around you.	58	41	1	100% (71)

independence. The Municipal Commissioner heads the executive and looks after the execution. His powers are wide and he may even refuse to execute a policy decision taken by the elected board.

The reality, however, is very different, the administration generally feels dependent and subservient and even in minor day to day matters, politicians have considerable say. Data presented in tables 4 and 4-a give some evidence on this. In these tables corporators' views are also given. As is to be expected most of the officers feel that there is interference in the administration but what is to be noted is that a majority of the corporators also agree with it. Thus interference in the administration by politicians (in a structural arrangement where politics - administration dichotomy is carried to an extreme). is a widely accepted fact on both sides and not merely the excuse of the administrators.

A high majority - 77 per cent. - of the administrators also argue that most of the time the corruption and irregularities for which

Table-4

	Officers	Corporators
Agree	10	44
Disagree	90	54
Others	-	2
Total	100% (71)	100% (57)

Table 4-a

Most of the time corruption and irregularities for which the officials are blamed are done by the demands of and for the benefit of the political leaders.

	Officers	Corporators
Agree	77	37
Disagree	23	61
Other	-	2
Total	100% (71)	100% (57)



the administrators are blamed are done by the demands of and for the benefit of the politicians. <sup>is</sup> As/to be expected a majority of the politicians do not agree with this but what is surprising is that more than one-third of the corporators do agree with the statement.

This very strongly indicates that administrators are not as powerful as is generally believed, that those who argue, what prevents administrators from applying scientific management ? After all execution is their responsibility and application of management, since it primarily deals with execution, is solely within the power and responsibility of the administrators", will have to rethink the matter.

Some more data which throw further light on this aspect are reported in tables 5 and 5-a and table-6. Table 5 shows that a high majority of both corporators and officers say that corporators walk into the offices of the administrators as and when they like.

Table 5

When corporators go to see officers do they observe certain procedures such as taking previous appointments, announcing their visit beforehand through a messenger or do they just walk in ?

	Officers	Corporators
1. Observe procedures	13	19
2. They just walk in	86	81
3. Depends	1	-
Total	100% (71)	100% (57)

Table - 5a

When corporators contact officers do they expect that officers pay immediate attention to them leaving everything aside ?

	Officers	Corporators
No	18	26
Yes	82	74
Total	<u>100%</u> <u>(71)</u>	<u>100%</u> <u>(57)</u>

Table - 6

What sort of problems the corporators bring to officers more often ? Do they mostly bring problems concerning personal favours to themselves and individual citizens or do they bring problems of larger city concern

	Officers	Corporators
1. Mostly personal favours	66	39
2. Mostly larger city problems	21	52
3. Both equally	10	9
4. Not ascertained	3	-
Total	<u>100%</u> <u>(71)</u>	<u>100%</u> <u>(57)</u>

Strictly speaking as per the organizational set up corporators are not supposed to have any need to contact officers often or directly but rarely a day passes when corporators do not contact officers. In the corporation that I studied the morning time was kept reserved for the officers to do office work or visiting work sites while some time in the afternoon was kept reserved for visitors. But officers could hardly

follow this schedule with any amount of regularity. Not only that, but those officers like the ward officers, whose major work was visiting various sites in their locality also had to disrupt their tour schedules often because most of the time they were summoned by corporators to pay attention to their work,

And when corporators make demands they expect as is evident from table-5a that officers must leave everything aside and pay immediate attention to the work that politicians bring to them.

The sort of work that politicians generally bring to the officers is of highly adhoc, individualized and of personal nature. Besides 76 per cent of the officers who said that corporators made either personalized demands or both personal and larger city concerned demands almost half the corporators also conceded the same. (Table-6).

All this evidence goes to show that officers may not be as free to systematize their work as is commonly believed. One may think (as I suspect many management experts think or so it would seem because of the attention that they have paid to the administrators only) that management applications particularly of highly technical nature is entirely within the jurisdiction of the administrators and if they really want to they can introduce them. But in reality even such specialized techniques as PERT, CPM information monitoring, supervision

and control systems would be difficult to introduce because they would not be allowed to work unless with the cooperation of the elected corporators.

Because of the highly politicized nature of municipal government (as most other governments) even in minor matters like regularizing information and feed back, adhering to the planned schedule of work or allocated priorities in rendering services to the citizens they may not have enough freedom. Unlike what is commonly believed about the rigidity of the administrators they are constantly forced to be flexible (or irregular?) to the point of being disfunctional.

This strongly suggests that those who are concerned about the modern management applications in public systems will have to take into consideration the political factor. They will have to interact with politicians and include them in their schemes of training and consultation. The tendency on the part of management educators to only trade the known ground, to tackle only the logico-rational (which in this context may well be an ostrich-syndrome) field, to avoid that which is uncertain, ambivalent and turbulent will have to change. Such an agenda is likely to create frustration and even turbulence in the world of management education. Because the management educators will be forced to rethink about not only their tools and techniques but their objectives and values.

In summary it should be noted that inspite of many problems and impedements there generally seems to be a good positive orientation towards management applications among the muncipal officers ofcourse, given their environment and their political problems it is not going to be easy. But it simply means that what is required is a fresh approach and more vigorous and systematic attempts.

I believe that in some respects muncipal bodies are ideally suited, inspite of their woefully low levels of performance, for management applications because : 1) a muncipal corporation is a relatively autonomous compact organization. The various departments are organically connected and focally located to make one compact organization. Unlike state or central government departments with branches and cells as well as organizational arrangements which tend to make them, administratively speaking, seperate governments, muncipal corporation stands as one body. It is, therefore, possible to devise schemes of management training and application for a corporation as one single unit. (3) For purposes of management training it is a fairly autonomous body under one executive head, the commissioner. (4) Administratively it is remarkably stable. Unlike state and central governments, officers in muncipal corporations are there as long as they do not leave their jobs. Most officers continue to hold the same positions for years

which make it easier to introduce and work the changes.

As to what kind of management training should be given to municipal administrators is a question that needs both careful thinking as well as detailed planning and study. Programmes may have to be developed which are tailored for corporations. However some general strategic guidelines can be considered here :

1. Firstly, the training programmes, even in regard to some general techniques, will have to be developed in such fashion that they meet their particular needs. Situation specific materials will have to be developed and this would require careful study and better understanding of the working of municipal government. Hurried and casual planning of the training programmes and 'off the shelf' materials have often been responsible in creating negative response.

2. In the initial stages the best way to make an impact would be to select one municipal body as a trainee and include all important personnel - at least of the top and middle level - as participants in the training programme.

3. Such programmes will have to be long term/comprising of phases relevant to various levels and functions.

4. Such programmes will also have to include the politicians involved with the municipal government. Whether it is feasible to give training to the politicians, whether they would be receptive to such a training and what kinds of training can be given to politicians

who are not directly responsible for execution, who are generalists and some of whom are illeducated, are questions which will have to be settled. These are questions which call for a separate and fuller treatment. Here it may just be observed that with right kind of approach and genuine commitment such an effort is both possible and rewarding. It is understandable that there are strong reservations among management educators about getting involved with politicians. Some of these apprehensions are justified but <sup>some</sup> / may be based on ill-informed notions and inadequate understanding of the political sector. In any case the problems, whatever they are, will have to be confronted. Because it is evident that not much can be accomplished unless an acceptance of modern management can be created among the decision makers.

5. In view of the environment in which the municipal administrators are functioning, a wider diffusion of management culture becomes necessary. It is needed to modify the environment itself. This suggests that organization development training programmes have a greater scope here. If the more technical changes are to get accepted and incorporated then there will have to be a wider change in attitudes and motivations. Incidentally <sup>organizational development</sup> / training would be very useful for politicians also and may help politicians and bureaucrats to relate to each other in more positive and fruitful ways.

6. The management educators will have to be prepared to trade

the less known and uncertain path. Because larger long term goals and even specific tasks in this area are not always measurable and explicitly defined. They may be called upon to devise frameworks that can handle value laden and less quantifiable "irrational" (but real) factors. They will have to show the readiness to handle those situations which cannot always be constructed into logical presentations because they may involve questions of political values, power considerations, tactical judgements or complicated balances among conflicting demands and objectives. In the longer run this may call for a movement towards "Policy Science".\*

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\* I am using the term policy science not in its traditional sense of policy analysis or policy making process analysis but in a sense which would incorporate the critical "components of management science into a value laden and politically reactive environment". See Michael J White et.al., Management and Policy Science in American Government (London:Lexington Book), 1975, pp 4-8.