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Decision making in educational institutions (Part-IV)

PHILOSOPHY: The philosophy may consist of doctrine(s) and set of values cherished by a nation. The basic philosophy for the development of National System of Bangladesh Education is derived from the preamble to the Bangladesh Constitution together with the guiding Principles of State Policy. The basic principles of equity and quality embodied in the constitution for the development of the educational system imply that all students have access to education of a comparable quality, irrespective of caste, creed, location or gender. It calls upon promotion of certain national, universal and eternal values such as Bangladesh's common cultural heritage, socialism, secularism, democracy, equality of genders, removal of social barriers, inculcation of scientific temper, protection of the environment etc. These principles and values serve as a perceptual screen for the educational administrators for evaluating the possible alternatives for making decisions in managing and developing the academic institutions.

Direction: The direction is the long-term perspective towards stated objectives. The National Policy on Education provided important directions for the development of education system. Where considerable expansion in educational facilities was achieved but desired improvements in educational system did not take place. The formulation of a New Education Policy became imperative to provide new directions to meet the emerging challenges and social needs.

The National Policy on Education provides a new perspective for radical reorganisation of content and process of education at all levels for the development of a National System of Education. It calls upon steps to facilitate inter-regional mobility in higher education in general and technical education in particular by providing equal access to every Bangladeshi person of requisite merit, regardless of his/her origin. In the context of unprecedented explosion of knowledge, it calls upon higher education to become ever more dynamic constantly entering unchartered areas. Some of the important directions given in the field of higher education include:



- Consolidation of, and expansion of facilities in existing institutions.
- Protecting the system from degradation.
- Development of autonomous college in large number until the affiliating system is replaced by a free and more creative association of universities with colleges.
- Creation of autonomous departments within universities on a selective basis.
- Redesigning of courses and programmes to meet the demands of specialization.
- Increasing flexibility in combination of courses.
- Provision of minimum facilities and regulation of admissions according to capacity.

The transformation of teaching methods.

- Teacher orientation and evaluation.
- Enhanced support for research in universities and ensuring its high quality.

Plan: A policy takes concrete shape only with the process of implementation. A plan is a blueprint of the programmes, strategies, methodology, resources and time frame etc. to achieve the desired objectives. Therefore, the action drawn by the government of Bangladesh needs broad strategies to implement the National Policy on Education. Within the above broad framework, the universities and other institutions of higher learning will have their own institutional plans for consolidation and expansion of facilities, creation of autonomous departments and development of autonomous colleges etc.

Personal and institutional values: Further, the personal values of decision-maker and the values of an institution influence the comparison and evaluation of alternatives. Harrison observes that all decisions are imbued with personal and organisational values. Value judgments arising out of personal value system of the decision-maker and conditioned by the values implicit in the organisational objectives are the rule rather than exception in the process of choice (1995). The fact and value dichotomy, with too much emphasis on facts to the exclusion of values may, therefore, come in the way of proper evaluation of an alternative.

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NADIM JAHANGIR

Decision making in educational institutions (Part-III)

A PROPER understanding of the background and the setting in which decision-making takes place is necessary as decisions cannot be made in vacuum. For this, one should develop proper problem sensitivity. Questioning in particular and observing in general the events and persons carefully and intelligently coordinating responses to problems seem to be the basic to the development of better problem sensitivity and for providing important clues to problem identification.

A questioning frame of mind is essential to analyse and synthesise the whole situation. Some of the questions need to aim at increasing one's awareness of his surroundings — the which, the what and how of things. Other questions concern the time and location of various events — the when and the where of things. The questions concerning the who, the group dynamics, the personalities involved and the question of healthy skepticism and the why of things should also guide one's development of problem sensitivity. A convenient check list of these important types of questions to be raised is provided by Rudyard Kipling's nursery rhyme:

"I keep six honest serving men
They taught me all I knew
Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who."

These questions are the mental tools and spanners to strip the matter down to the bare bone. Quite often attempts are made to find solutions without analysing and defining the problems correctly. Right questions or pertinent issues are not raised and et right answers or solutions are sought. To quote Peter Drucker, "There are few things as useless — if not as dangerous as the right answer to wrong questions." Decision-making in such cases becomes an exercise in futility. Much worse, many a time, with a view to sidetrack or divert the real issues due to vested interests or other reasons, the problems are analysed wrongly and wrong solutions are suggested. Such a lack of professional integrity and honesty of purpose degenerate decision-making into a farce, which eventually brings grief to the decision-maker and the institution.

If a problem is not ascertained correctly, the decision instead of solving the problem may complicate the situation and make the functioning more difficult. The disastrous effects of wrong decisions in the field of education are sure to endanger the health of the nation. A problem is half solved, if defined properly. Therefore, utmost care needs to be taken to get rid of disastrous effects of the wrong decision-making process

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Search for alternatives:

After having defined the problem, the next step is to search for alternative solutions. To ensure selection of the best possible solution, it should be an unalterable rule to develop several viable alternatives for every problem.

One has to train, discipline and develop mind's vision to arrive at solutions. To quote Peter Drucker again "A blind man, to be sure, cannot learn to see. But it is amazing how much a person with normal eyesight does not see, and how much he can perceive through systematic training of the vision. Similarly, minds vision can be trained, disciplined and developed. And the method for this is the systematic search for and development of solutions to the problems."

A major test of quality of a decision-maker is his ability to discover the full range of viable alternatives available in a particular situation, with various permutations and combinations and from amongst them to select the ideal solution which will yield the most satisfactory result(s). Inability to gauge the existence of the available alternatives is a mark of administrative inefficiency and lethargy.

Evaluating alternatives:

Once the problem has been defined and the relevant alternatives found, the next step is to evaluate the alternatives.

Operations research, statistical analysis and computer programming etc. are important tools to help in decision-making and have imparted a scientific aura to the process of choice by presenting management with an array of alternative solutions to a given problem, arrange them in order of their desirability and probability of success. In essence, these are tools of information and information processing and enable decisions with a high degree of rationality. While many aspects can be easily quantified with considerable accuracy, there remain many important factors that are intangible or qualitative and must be evaluated on the basis of executive judgment and deliberations.

Bases of decision making:

To quote Chester Barnard: " The fine art of executive decision consists in not deciding questions that are not now pertinent, in not deciding prematurely, in not making decisions that cannot be made effective and in not making decisions that others should make." These observations provide a good insight into some of the operational parametres of decision making. The bases of decision making, however, comprise a number of basic and other operational parametres for evaluating alternatives and making decisions judiciously in the interest of the educational institutions of our nation.

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NADIM JAHANGIR

Decision making in educational institutions (Part-II)

Various definitions of the term 'decision' focus on some of its important features, namely judgment, self-conscious and deliberative choice or selection of an alternative, problem solving, and achievement of goals and objectives. In simple words, one may treat the term 'decision' as the best course of action chosen by an administrator from several alternatives as the most effective means at his/her disposal for solving problem and achieving goals. Sound decisions are characterised by judicious, purposive and rational behaviuor.

Steps in decision-making

While taking a decision, measures need to be taken in a logical or step-by-step sequence. The process begins with problem definition and ends with the implementation of the decision. There is one factor that militates against a careful step-by-step approach to decision-making — there is often not enough time to gather all the important and relevant information and carry out a thorough evaluation of choices. Although there often seems to be insufficient "thinking time", yet such an approach to the extent feasible would substantially enhance the quality of decisions and their effective implementation. Rational thinking and judgment goes a long way in developing a clean line of action. Each step in the sequence will now be discussed in some detail.

Problem identification

Problem identification and enunciation is the first and foremost step in decision-making. Analysing is basic to problem solving. When approached with a problem, a reputed Indian philosopher, Prof J. Krishnamurthy, cryptically replied: "The answer is in the problem." His answer only highlighted the need for a clear understanding of the problem, its correct analysis and definition for right solution. Analysis does not imply tearing things to bits, like a child dismantling a toy, but establishing the relations of the parts to each other and to the whole.

Problem analysis will also help administrators to examine the various elements of the problem with clarity. Holistic view and systems approach are, however, essential for correct definition of the problem and its right solution. Elaborating on the holistic view, John Adair observes that the holistic mind "is not eager to take things to bits at first glance. Rather it waits until it sees the pattern, the whole in relation to the parts, hence a certain reluctance to dismember. If a nasty schoolboy pulls the legs and wings off a fly, he is left with a dead fly; the parts are there but the whole is gone". So, the systems approach with its emphasis on close relationship of various inter-acting sub-systems and systems emphasises investigation of the problem in a large context.

Today, and increasingly in future, educational administrators must be able to see the problems of academic institutions from a holistic view and adopt a systems approach to respond to them in the larger context of the interacting sub-systems within the educational system as well as in relation to total socio-economic-political system. It would be fallacious to take a narrow view of the common problems, interpreting them in a single disciplinary or functional way. The problems cannot be solved and functioning of academic institutions cannot be radically improved unless a new work ethic is created in which students study, teachers teach, workers work and administrators manage and critical changes in the system itself are made taking a holistic view and systems approach.



Defining the problem is not an easy task. Problems seldom present themselves as cases on which decisions can be taken. Quite often remedies are addressed to what is merely a symptom rather than the problem itself. The problem, which is perceived as students' indiscipline may really be a problem of student frustration due to the authority's apathy towards their genuine demands, manifests itself in defiance and confrontation. Again what is perceived as a problem of declining student interest in studies may in reality be a problem of poor quality courses offered with little relevance to real life situation or a substandard level of teaching, which demotivates the students from learning. Similarly, where a problem is perceived as a clash of personalities between the Head of institutions and his/her Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Joint Director/Executive Director, Deans or Heads of the departments etc., the real problem may well be poor organisational structure and management practices which do not give them functional freedom essential for innovation and creativity. A number of examples could be cited to illustrate how perfunctory assessment of problems may elude their correct definition. An in-depth analysis, holistic insight and systems approach would, therefore, seem necessary for correct definition of the problem.

Institutional goals and objectives are critical for problem identification. Problems are seen as failure to achieve institutional goals and objectives including factors that come in the way of their accomplishment. With reference to universities, there are problems to the extent universities fail in their roles of teaching research, extension, acculturating and manpower development, and above all promoting international understanding to work for a genuine world society. Similarly, the goals and objectives for which Dhaka University (DU), Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology(BUET), Chittagong University Engineering and Technology (CUET), Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET), Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET), Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB), North South University (NSU), BRAC University, East-West University (EWU), Rajshahi University (RU), Chittagong University (CU), Barisal University (BU), Khulna University (KU) and other universities and institutions have been established are critical for problem identification in the decision-making processes in the management of these institutions. A proper understanding of the background and the setting in which decision-making takes place is necessary as decisions cannot be made in vacuum. For this, one should develop proper problem sensitivity.

Specified operational goals, norms or targets serve as automatic problem signals to different levels of management in the sense that they clearly specify what is expected of them. Schedule of completing admissions, starting academic sessions, completing courses, internal assessment, annual and supplementary examinations and declaring results; norms of class size, minimum classroom, library, laboratory and other facilities; minimum number of working days in a semester, minimum time every teacher should spend in the institutions; number of tutorials and seminars; quantum of academic and para-academic work for teachers teaching in under-graduate and post-graduate courses and for as many aspects of institution's operations for which measurable standards, schedules or norms can be fixed, serve as problem signals. Under the technique of Management by Exception (MBE), when there is a deviation (or exception) from the established standard, norm or schedule, there is a problem signal for immediate attention calling for effective intervention by the head of the institution or other appropriate level. If the problem signals are ignored or not taken seriously, the problem may assume critical dimensions and develop into crisis leading to head-on confrontation.

Getting the facts and analysing them correctly are necessary for problem appreciation and right solutions. Facts are incontestable and irrefutable. A thorough collection of facts, therefore, is very essential for decision-making. It is said that a good decision is 90% information and 10% inspiration. However, care must be taken that pursuit of facts does not lead to delay in taking a timely decision. Information overload also must be avoided, which may prove detrimental to decision quality by forcing decision-makers to spend time for organising the information instead of solving the problem. One should also be able to dismiss the merely interesting but irrelevant data and distinguish between valid and misleading information. Further getting the information is only part of the job, using the information as a means to test the validity of the whole approach is equally important.

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The opinions expressed in the articles are the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily coincide with that of the newspaper.



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Decision making in educational institutions (Part-I)

BANGLADESH has a large network of universities, colleges and other institutions of higher learning at both government and private sectors. These institutions are catering to the education of millions of students and trainees, thousands of professionals and other functionaries at various levels in different sectors of the country's national economy and polity. Fulfilment of the nation's dream to win destiny largely depends on her ability as well as sincere efforts to develop these institutions, which constitute the most important element in the contemporary and emerging national system, as centers of excellence; mould them into effective instruments of producing quality scientists, technologists, agronomists, doctors, teachers, managers, administrators, economists, statisticians and various other experts that the society needs; and give these cadres a sense of purpose and social commitment corresponding to national aspirations. Decision-making in the governance and development of these institutions is of crucial importance in this context.

The Educational System and Decision-Making in Bangladesh

The educational system in Bangladesh is three-tiered and highly subsidised. The government of Bangladesh operates many schools in the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. It has also subsidised parts of the funding for many private schools. In the tertiary education sector, the government also funds more than 15 state universities through the University Grants Commission (UGC). Three educational systems in Bangladesh are:

1) General Education System
2) Madrasah Education System
3) Technical-Vocational Education System.

Other systems include a Professional Education System. Each of these three main systems is divided into four levels:

i) Primary level (years 1 to 5)
ii) Secondary level (years 6 to 10)
iii) Higher Secondary level (years 11 to 12)
iv) Tertiary Level

Tertiary education in Bangladesh takes place at 34 government and 54 private universities. Students can choose further studies in engineering technology, agriculture and medicine at a variety of universities and colleges. At all levels of schooling students can choose to receive their education in English or Bengali. Private schools tend to make use of English-based media while government sponsored school use Bengali.

Cadet colleges are important in the education system of Bangladesh. A cadet college is a special type of school-cum-college established in East Pakistan on a model of English public schools. Military education is compulsory at the Cadet Colleges. The then government of Pakistan established the first residential cadet college in the Punjab in 1954. Faujdarhat Cadet College was the first cadet college in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), established in 1958 over an area of 185 acres of land at Faujdarhat in the district of Chittagong. At present there are 12 Cadet Colleges in Bangladesh.

The Madrasah Education system focuses on religious education, teaching all the basics of education in a religious environment. Islamic teachings are compulsory. Religious subjects are taught in Arabic and the children also usually serve the related mosques. Students also study some or all of the courses from the General Education System. Madrasahs take in many homeless children and provide them with food, shelter and education.

The Technical and Vocational Education System provides courses related to various applied and practical areas of science, technology and engineering or focuses on a specific specialised area.

Tertiary education in Madrasah Education system

In Madrasah Education System, after passing 'Dakhil' (10th grade) and 'Alim" (12th Grade), a student can enroll in for a 3 year long study, for obtaining 'Fazil' level (14th Grade), as well as they can go for further general education like earning all other university degrees. And after passing successfully, they can further enrol into another 2 year long study system to obtain 'Kamil' level (16th Grade) degree.

Tertiary education in Technical Education System

In the Technical Education System, after obtaining Diploma-in-Engineering degree (four years long curriculum), students can further pursue their educational career for obtaining a Bachelor degree from Engineering & Technology Universities, while they offer two and a half to three year long courses for students with a Diploma-in-Engineering degree, to obtain a Bachelor degree (Undergraduate degree: 16th Grade) in Engineering. Then they can enroll into post-graduate studies.

Regarding management of education

The primary and secondary levels of education are controlled by the six general education boards, each covering a region. The boards' headquarters are located in Barisal, Comilla, Chittagong, Dhaka, Jessore, Rajshahi and Sylhet. In addition, the Madrasah Education Board covers religious education in government-registered Madrasahs, and the Technical Education Board controls technical and vocational training in the secondary level. Six region-based Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) are responsible for conducting two public examinations, SSC and HSC, in addition to granting recognition to non-government secondary schools. At the school level, in the case of non-government secondary schools, School Management Committees (SMC), and at the intermediate college level, in the case of non-government colleges, Governing Boards (GB), formed as per government directives, are responsible for mobilising resources, approving budgets, controlling expenditures, appointing and disciplining staff. While teachers of non-government secondary schools are recruited by concerned SMCs observing relevant government rules, teachers of government secondary schools are recruited centrally though a competitive examination. In government secondary schools, there is not an SMC. The headmaster is solely responsible for running the school and is supervised by the deputy director of the respective zone. Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs), however, exist to ensure a better teaching and learning environment. In all these situations, decision-making procedures are very important. At the tertiary level, universities are regulated by the University Grant Commission (UGC). The colleges providing tertiary education are under the National University of Bangladesh. Each of the medical colleges is affiliated to a public university. Universities in Bangladesh are autonomous bodies administered by statutory bodies such as Syndicate, Senate, Academic Council, etc. in accordance with the provisions laid down in their respective acts. A good many of private universities and private medical colleges have also enriched our education system where decision-making is very important. In these institutions students need to pay fees at a very high rate but they are here entitled to a lot of modern educational facilities. Seminars, symposiums and workshops have become a regular feature of education in these institutions.

The educational institutions, barring a few honourable exceptions, have become virtual battle fields, in which political and other sections backed by teachers and other staff, aided by political parties, often fight pitched battles for power and supremacy. Some Vice-Chancellors and Registrars/Deputy Registrars/Asst. Registrars spend their entire term of office behind barricades, and sometimes they find no alternative of signing official papers from their houses. The achievement of a university is judged not on the basis of quality of its research or the competence of its students but by its adherence to the schedule of examinations and the prevention of faced closures. The statement- "Challenge of education- A Policy Perspective" refers to the sad state of affairs prevalent in almost all the government academic institutions in the country. The functioning of these institutions gets paralysed by the frequent strikes and violence in the campus leading to serious confrontations between different students-fronts as well as with the authorities in which basic issues get blurred and merits of the decisions are obscured.

The virtual collapse of the educational system, changing values of life of the students and the teaching communities in particular and society at large, various socio-economic, political and other forces and influences acting upon the educational system have made decision-making in the management of academic institutions a very difficult and challenging job. So, the concerned administrators need to be very careful and judicious while making decisions to run the administration of educational institutions in Bangladesh. Decisions are required to be make keeping in view the interest of the students and the nation at large and with this end in view, the situation in the universities need to be tranquil.

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