

# THE DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATOR AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

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The man in the middle of the development process in 1965 is most certainly the development administrator -- that government official charged with the responsibility of carrying out (and sometimes formulating) a government's development policy. A vast amount of recent scholarship has been devoted to the development process in its economic, social, and political aspects, but sometimes the crucial *agent* of change is overlooked and it is assumed that economic plans are self-enforcing, social change a spontaneous response, and politicians able to put policy into effect. Scholars of the new field of Development Administration and development administrators themselves recognize the crucial place of administration in the development process.

One way of looking at the development administrator is in terms of the many environmental constraints he operates under and his area of discretion within those constraints. From the administrator's point of view, there exists a broad social, economic, and political environment (abbreviated, E.S.P. Environment) and a more immediate "Administrative Environment" which impinges upon the individual administrator and conditions his efforts in bringing about change. Whether he is in charge of a ministry, a section, or a small field office, he must contend with both the E.S.P. Environment and the Administrative Environment. Characteristics of the larger E.S.P. Environment have been well cataloged in recent years, but the Administrative Environment in developing areas is less well understood. Each Administrative Environment differs, since the history of each organization and the personalities of its members differ, but certain questions can be asked about the immediate administrative situation and, if improvement is called for, a prognosis made as to the prospects for such improvement:

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Is the Administrative Environment hostile to change ?  
 What do the opinion leaders or influentials in the work situations say about development or change ?

Is there a general feeling of contentment with things as they are or a desire for improvement ?

What are the expectations of superiors, co-workers, and subordinates concerning planned change within the organization itself ?

The literature on public administration is replete with ideas for improving administrative structure, practices, and personnel. Often these ideas take the form of principles or rules of general applicability to various administrative situations. For the developing country, one might glean from the literature a prescription for administrative improvement involving the following core ideas :

- Honesty in government
- Appointment and promotion by merit
- Authority commensurate with responsibility
- Elimination of overlapping and duplication
- Elimination of red tape
- Objective and impartial treatment of all citizens

Virtually every student of public administration and many enlightened government officials in all parts of the world are familiar with these themes and recognize them to be of cardinal importance. The difficulty, of course, is that even when they are recognized by those who make decisions, they are not easily implemented in the face of severe environmental constraints.

To contend with the Administrative Environment and the larger E. S. P. Environment, the conscientious development administrator---whatever his level--needs a **strategy** of development.

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## STRATEGY

A strategy – in the sense used here – is a **complete plan** which takes into account all contingencies which can be realistically visualized. It is a plan of action which provides alternate routes if circumstances or opponents upset the original course of action. As such it is not a panacea and can offer no guaranteed solutions to development problems. At best it is a guideline which can provide some help for the development administrator with a high need for achievement, technical and administrative competence, and a capacity for getting along with his subordinates, peers, and superiors. It is something which each development administrator works out for himself – explicitly or implicitly – to define his own actions. In the simplest terms, a strategy may indicate any of the following types of alternatives at a choice point:

- Do nothing
- Contact a superior
- Contact a co-worker
- Refer to a manual or law
- Make a calculated guess

These are just a few of the possible ways to avoid or approach a problem.

Development administrators at all levels are required to make decisions or take action on various matters and **the way they do so** is important. Delay, cross checking, counter-signing, upward referral, refusal to assume responsibility, etc., may serve very functional purposes in protecting employees and providing opportunities for additional jobs and external rewards. They are found – often in more sophisticated forms – in the bureaucracies of the most advanced countries.

What can the individual administrator do to assist in developing his country? What kind of strategy of development can he adopt to help fulfill his “catalytic” role in the face of so many obstacles?

Let us forget about all government employees who have no motivation to improve themselves or their government, or who are so incompetent that cannot understand or undertake what is required of them. Let us assume that the administrator has some n-Achievement, in McClelland’s terms.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society*, (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1961).

The person who will employ a viable strategy is one who is not easily discouraged when things do not work out. He doesn't say "it doesn't matter" or "what's the use"; he doesn't give reasons **why not** without attempting to find reasons **why**. He overcomes obstacles by taking necessary risks and forges ahead within his own sphere of competence.

The strategy begins with a recognition that the starting point is where one is at the moment. Hence, there is no idealized plan which is suddenly achieved, but a gradual, systematic progression towards agreed-upon goals.

There are few "principles" to follow. A pay increase may be supported in one situation but not in another (where it will merely increase the waste); re-organization may be desirable to alleviate overlapping and duplication, but it may be better to avoid the existing organization and build a new one.

There are no optional or ideal solutions; only **system** solutions which consider all relevant variables, including resistance to change.

For the individual administrator, whatever his level, a beginning point, then, is to **DEFINE WHERE HE STANDS**. This means studying and identifying the dimensions and power of the numerous **constraints** under which he is operating and, also, his area of discretion. Policies, rules, laws, beliefs, customs, habits, and feelings must be understood. He cannot violate the law, nor can he violate time-honored traditions without the prospect of trouble. He needs a realistic perspective of his constraints and area of discretion. When this is visualized, the question becomes how to operate within the area of discretion. His knowledge of the job and of people; his ideas concerning improvements define his course of action within the area of discretion. If the constraints are such as to restrict useful, honest and objective service, it becomes desirable to seek remedies. This is essentially, a **POWER** issue.

Personal power or collective power - without any of its invidious connotations - is the best **concept** to account for a viable strategy of improvement.

This means:

- 1) Utilizing available resources which he has as an individual.
    - a. Through effective supervision
    - b. Through logic and persuasion
    - c. Through an orientation towards service
    - d. Through ascribed or achieved leadership
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- 2) Entering into coalitions with others.
  - a. Friendships
  - b. Professional associations
  - c. Alignment with scholars and community leaders
  - d. Bargains of a legal and ethical nature

**Motivation** becomes all important. There must be a reason for change and a reward for change. There must be people genuinely interested rather than vaguely complaining that "something ought to be done."

**Improvement from within**, by means of enlightened catalytic agents who desire to achieve in a constructive direction, is quite possible in both developing and "developed" administrative systems.

Beginning where we are, we analyze the current situation without pre-conception. We see what the constraints are and what the area of discretion is. We operate effectively within the area of discretion and assess our power to counteract the harmful constraints.

In moving forward in the administrative situation – as in the general E.S.P. situation – certain barriers must be overcome before progress is possible. Whatever they are, the barriers are attacked and when removed, ameliorated, or circumvented, ongoing, productive development can be undertaken. A key aspect of progress through effective administrative action is the maintenance of good working relationships. Personal antagonisms, rivalries, and misunderstandings can thwart the best of plans; harmonious cooperation can often accomplish much even in absence of a "rational" plan.

Ongoing, productive development may gain in favor as the ideas of progressive-minded development administrators permeate downward, sideways, and even upward in the administrative hierarchy. Bottlenecks are removed, through awareness of the benefits of a smoother running organization.

Admittedly this is a highly simplified picture of how change can be accomplished, but it is an alternative to the shakeups occasioned by crises or pressures from external groups.

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**SUMMARY**

The individual development administrator, whether he is at the top of the hierarchy or the bottom, works in a complex environment which includes economic, social, and political dimensions. Within the broad national and community framework, the administrator experiences the constraints of his immediate administrative environment: laws, rules, regulations, policies, customs, attitudes, beliefs, moral standards, and so forth.

If he conscientiously seeks to assist in development, he works as effectively as possible within the existing constraints and attempts to change those constraints when they are harmful.

His approach is based on careful study and wide understanding, but is essentially entrepreneurial. He is achievement oriented in the fullest sense of the word and can use his technical, human and strategic skills in the most effective manner to fulfill his role as a catalyst.

As the "man in the middle" of planned change, he has an important role in the success or failure of economic, social, and political development.

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