



I cannot deny that I am a trained management professional. Not because I have done formal management education for full four years but because I joined an organization which was at a cusp of change – way back in 1976. The four years of formal education just initiated me to the concept of management and nothing beyond. The real school of management for me was the organization I worked with for 26 years and more.

When I began my career with Azim Premji Foundation, I found enormous resistance to the word “management” in the NGO world. Whereas in our analysis, the most critical problems in poor quality education system were related to absence of a shared vision, lack of strategy, inappropriate structures, low quality people development and policies that did not support people empowerment. The issues were related to poor governance, centralization of power and non-participation of people in making decisions that affected them.

In other words, it was a huge problem of an effective management of a large system.

To support my claim, I am presenting below just six issues:

- 1. Creating a shared vision of education** – National Policy for Education in many ways is the vision document for the nation. National Curriculum Framework – another important document describes the philosophy of education for the country and together, these two documents set the education agenda for India. However, the ignorance on both these documents among majority of the people engaged in education (including the teachers) is shocking. How do you expect the country to achieve anything in education when the agenda is not clear to most people engaged in delivering that agenda?
- 2. Accountability for results:** the adage “what gets measured gets done” would have been so appropriate for the education execution. On an average over 50% students appearing for the tenth standard board examination across the country fail. Who is accountable for this performance? The state education minister? The education secretary? The teacher? Currently only the failing student or his/her parents are held responsible.

Almost 50% students in the fifth grade are unable to read simple text in their mother tongue. Whose accountability is it to ensure this? To enable accountability you need risk-reward framework that encourages better performance through appropriate recognition.

- 3. Competency based people practices:** Some years ago, when I raised the issue of evolving criteria for teacher appointment beyond the existing system of considering just the marks obtained in the B Ed examination, only two members in the special national level panel for teacher education supported me. When I gave an example from service industry that created almost half a million professionals in hospitality and service industry in the past ten years – everyone scoffed at me as a useless guy who has some corporate management background. Their point was – the job of teachers and that of service industry people cannot be compared – because it is too complex and too fundamental to the future of our country. Therefore, I argued – how can we select people for such a critical role merely on the basis of their B Ed marks? The committee ignored my questions.
- 4. Implementing large programs need high degree of management skills:** the midday meal program for instance has a budget of around Rs. 3000 crore and caters to about 110 million children in primary schools. The program is supposed to deliver around 400 calories, 12 grams of protein and supply of micronutrients to each child each day as per government’s own policy. In reality, the program involves three departments of the government: the education department that is responsible for supplying cooked meal, the food ministry to ensure adequate quantity of food grain supply and the panchayat raj department that has the ultimate responsibility to supply grains to the school. Today we have a very uneven quality of food across schools, the calorie and proteins are much lower and the micronutrients are almost non-existent. The program cannot succeed unless planned well and unless the people

involved understand the purpose of the program.

5. **Execution is everything:** Several incentive programs are introduced by almost all state Governments; that include free text books, free uniforms, cycles for girl children etc. In many cases, the benefit either does not reach the child or reaches very late. Illustratively, if the text books reach the child six months later (which it often does) – the child is at a loss. The child has to either go without study or force his/her parents to buy books though they cannot afford. In many cases, since the uniforms don't reach on time, the children are forced to wash their uniform overnight and wear them even if they are torn.
6. **Performance of vital institutions:** In order to give effect to its policies, the Government created institutions such as the NCERT, NUEPA, DSCERT, DIETs and resource agencies at the block and the cluster level. Today these institutions suffer with several infirmities - primarily due to people not being appointed based on necessary competence (many of these – especially at the district level are parking places for non-performing people), inadequate infrastructure, critical posts being vacant, non-existent quality parameters and above all, non-monitoring of performance of these institutions. The National Policy for Education clearly articulated the need to continuously provide resources for reviewing how machineries are functioning.
7. **Getting the best out of available funds** The overall spending on school education in the country is in excess

of US\$ 14 billion (approximately Rs. 63000 crore) per annum. 90% of this amount is spent on teacher salary – however, hardly any effort is made to ensure that the teachers are well prepared and well developed to be able to meet the expectations of their role. Almost Rs. 1000 crore are budgeted for in-service teacher development program but no teachers find the training useful for their work. Successful corporate organizations spend upto 5% of their total manpower expenses for the purpose of making the system work. Such a concept is unknown to the government system.

Education is a complex process especially in a country like India that is characterized by socio-economic, cultural and linguistic diversity. There is a need to act with a very high degree of efficiency, precision and meticulous planning and monitoring. These are nothing but management issues.

The country is trying to manage 1.3 million schools across 30 states and 640 districts that are supposed to benefit 220 million children who are the future citizens. And over 6.5 million education functionaries are engaged in this execution. To make things worse, there is constant political interference, high leakages of funds, rent seeking across levels and complete absence of risk-reward system to promote accountability. Bureaucrats are frequently transferred – creating discontinuity of plans and vision.

You require highly sophisticated and well crafted public systems to manage such a huge delivery system.

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