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## UNIT 18 ENHANCING BUREAUCRATIC CAPABILITIES: NEW CHALLENGES

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### 18.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, the learners shall be able to:

- Understand the concept of bureaucratic capability;
- Highlight the limitations of South Asian bureaucracies;
- Identify the challenges to administrative capability; and
- Explain the strategy for enhancing the capacity.

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### 18.1 INTRODUCTION

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The South Asian countries were under the British Rule for about two centuries. During this period, the bureaucracy was fashioned as a highly efficient instrument of British power. Its efficiency consisted mainly in serving well the interest of the foreign power and not those of the people of South Asian countries. Also the bureaucracy tended to acquire powers of its own. Thus, the interests of bureaucracy were largely different from those of the people. Its role during British rule was narrow and objectives were largely negative, rather than positive. It aimed at maintenance of law and order rather than improvement of the living conditions of the people. With coming of independence, the bureaucracy is expected to play a new, much more positive role of bringing about development. While everyone agrees about the desirability of such a change in its role, the change does not come about. There are several reasons about this; one of the very important reasons is the bureaucratic capability. In this unit we will try to discuss about the capabilities of bureaucracy in the context of South Asian countries and try to discuss the limitations, challenges and strategy for enhancing the bureaucratic capability.

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### 18.2 CAPABILITY OF BUREAUCRATIC ORGANISATIONS

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A discussion on the capability of bureaucratic organisations needs to be clear on the very concept of bureaucratic capability. The bureaucracy is a form of organisation where the relations between the members are formally structured and the behavioural norms are externally defined. The group should conform to the normative standards where the relations are subjected to objective criterion.

In this logic of organised activity, greater the capacity of the members individually and collectively to go beyond the subjective judgements, higher is the bureaucratic capability. In fact, it was this primary consideration, which led to Max Weber's famous thesis on bureaucracy. Weber was fascinated by the human potential to elevate itself from subjective compulsions to objective norms. And his entire essay on bureaucracy is grounded on that premise.

This advent of new form of bureaucratic organisation in the wake of market driven development contained several elements which were not only distinctly different from that of pre-capitalist organisational modes but were strikingly impressive as they freed members of the organisations from personal bondage and the organisations from the stranglehold of arbitrary power. The new norms for the bureaucratic functioning were more secular, universal and based on the principle of commensurate authority-accountability structure. This had all the built in logic to generate more collective action than the earlier forms of organisation.

This logic and the forms of organisations are developed, as stated earlier, in Europe more so in Germany and France in the backdrop of capitalist development. The strength of capitalism lies largely in its drive for rapid material advancement, which, is in turn, largely dependent on tapping of human reasoning and therefore, rationality. Max Weber held a romantic view of rationality and considered the legal rational authority far superior to the earlier forms of traditional and charismatic authority, which were hierarchical, subjective, arbitrary, personal, and personality centric. The new organisational form was essentially purpose-centric and solely rooted in human reason. This is what determined its capability. It is true and there is enough of evidence suggesting that the bureaucratic forms of organisation founded in four important premises viz.; merit, neutrality, anonymity and permanent, did meet several of the requirements of capitalist order and positively helped in creating conditions for rapid accumulation. The point that one should recognise is that the inter connections between market driven development; the primacy of human reason and the bureaucratic rationality were logical and mutually reinforcing. It is for these reasons that there was not much of debate on bureaucratic capabilities within the European development experience.

The question of bureaucratic capabilities is an endemic problem in most of the developing countries in general and the South Asian countries in particular. The bureaucratic forms of organisation came to the South Asian sub-continent through the colonial rule. The colonial purpose of bureaucratic organisations, in contrast to the capitalist order, was to extract the surplus from the South Asian hinterland and not to invest and maximise the returns on investment. This means the logic and purpose that led to the origin of bureaucratic organisations in Europe were different from the way that the bureaucratic organisations were designed in the South Asian context. In one case it was the consideration of development and in another case it were the compulsions of dominance. This led to a strange situation where the bureaucratic organisations in South Asia in form were akin to the European models but in content and actual working were significantly different from their European counter parts. This conflict between the form and the content continues to be one of the limitations to the capabilities of the bureaucratic organisations. The impact of colonialism on the form of organisations was deep and profound. This could have been altered or transformed during the freedom movements, which challenged the legitimacy of the colonial rule. These movements did not question the forms of organisations. Instead, the freedom movements were built and preceded with conflict and

confrontation at one level and compromises and concessions at another. It was the latter process that paved the way not only for greater consolidation of bureaucratic forms but deepening the foundations of these organisations in the South Asian soil.

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### 18.3 LIMITATIONS OF SOUTH ASIAN BUREAUCRACIES

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It is this historical context that accounts for the persistence of the colonial forms of organisations after the attainment of political independence of many of these South Asian nations. The point of conflict and areas of tensions were triggered by the fact that none of these South Asian nations explicitly committed themselves to capitalist development. On the contrary, many of them were very critical of the capitalist path of development. Their political pronouncements were such that they were in search of models of development, which were non-capitalist, if not socialist or egalitarian. This created a new context wherein there was inevitable conflict between the forms of organisation and the new content was imparted by a new purpose. This tension continues to haunt these countries and became one of the major challenges to the post-independent political systems.

It was Fred W. Riggs who made serious attempt to analyse as to why the bureaucracies in the post-colonial societies have not been able to cope with the challenges of change and development. This led him to a new paradigm through which he explained the unsuitability or the distortions of transplanted administrative system from the industrial societies to that of the agrarian societies. The overall culture of the society is determined or conditioned by its agrarian or industrial nature of development. He argues that industrial societies are structurally and functionally more differentiated than the relatively simple agrarian societies. As there is a striving of agrarian societies to become industrial they are neither able to operate through an agrarian framework of values and institutions nor are they able to internalise the modes of thinking and working of an industrial society. This transition from the agrarian to industrial is not easy and orderly. The institutions get subjected to varied forms of changes exhibiting modes of behaviour, which were hitherto unknown. With the result there is undue stress on the systems calling for various forms of negotiations to cope with the changes than developing their own capacity to accelerate the process of change. This led to an important formulation that administrative systems are more the victims of socio-economic change than the active agents of transformation.

A review of the studies on the third world bureaucracies point out the following ailments:

The inability of administrative systems to develop built-in capacity to improve its inner processes and performance;

Wide spread tendency towards centralisation of decision-making;

Wild spread corruption-giving rise to subversion of the legal rational authority;

The culture of distrust permeating the entire working of the administrative apparatus;

The alienation of the groups, which are to be covered from the policy process;  
and

The Treatment of power, as a substitute to knowledge, impairing the capability to learn or unlearn.

These findings raise a very important question: what are the sources of change and instruments of development? If the administrative systems were to play critical role, what forms of organisations do we need or how do we design or redesign the administrative systems so as to overcome the above stated problems? This is by far the biggest challenge to the political systems, which have not been able to restructure the administrative instruments so as to endow them with the necessary capacity or capability to cope with the new challenges.

Almost every South Asian nation tried to initiate administrative reforms. This, they ought to have done at the time of their advent of independence. The arrival of independence is perhaps the most opportune moment to introduce momentous changes. The failure to capture such opportunity involves high price. This is something that each nation witnessed and experienced through their own painful failure to realise the developmental goals.

It is also equally true that whatever attempts they made to bring about changes through administrative reforms, the attempts literally fumbled. The causes for the failure to bring about administrative reforms are not adequately analysed in many of these societies. In a way the research has been able to point out the shortfalls but has not been able to provide a package of reforms capable of overcoming these maladies. This failure led to a broad consensus at least at the level of policy makers that the functions performed by the state through its incapable administrative system be transferred to the market. This fits in well with the capitalist model of development where the market forces have a primacy over the other forces of development.

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## **18.4 CHALLENGES TO ADMINISTRATIVE CAPABILITIES**

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The changed context is throwing up the following challenges and therefore the need to build the administrative capability: New economic reforms and global competition; Rebuilding the Nation state on new premises; Uneven development and underdevelopment; Social strife and ethnic conflict; and the new social and radical movements. These new challenges are briefly discussed below.

Firstly, the retreat of the state and rise of the power and influence of market through the process of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation led altogether to a new context. These changes have come to be described as borderless world, global village, and so on. It is not that these processes were earlier absent, but they were dormant. They have taken a quantum jump and pushed all the nations - developed and undeveloped - into cobwebs of open and global competition. Although, it is widely believed that the technology and the market forces would take care of the new developments, it is faulty to believe that the administrative systems can go for load shedding. This is not true. What is emerging is that while the 'old' tasks are abandoned, 'new' tasks are coming up for which the administrative systems hitherto have had no experience. The new challenges are challenges of technology; particularly information technology or what has come to be romantically described as 'information society'. These new forces talk of downsizing of bureaucracy and wide uses of the new technology such as e-governance.

The old structures, modes of behaviour and the techno-managerial processes have to give in to the new ways of thinking and doing and not once or twice but as an ongoing process. For these technologies get innovated every day and their thrust seem to be rapid and ever changing. The new challenge puts the capacity to learn and unlearn to a test. In short, can administrative culture be so reoriented that the functionaries should develop what may be called the culture of life long learning. This may call for new packages of training along with training institutions capable of imparting the new knowledge and ability to jump over the experiential boundaries. If the organisational systems fail, the global forces will overtake with such gusto that one would be left far behind.

The new context of borderless world creates fresh challenge to the very concept of Nation State. The Nation-State as an entity came into being more to protect the invasion of the outside capital. That is what sovereignty stands all for. In a context where capital is getting increasingly globalised and all restrictions are being removed, what is the function of the Nation-State is question waiting for a satisfactory answer.

There is, however, one task and that is the task of regulating the labour movement. The new economic reforms are not providing similar opportunities for the mobility of labour as is provided for the capital. This will lead to a spate of problems. The administrative systems will have to negotiate with the new situation with far lesser legitimacy and even authority. The concept of legal rational authority stands challenged, as the legal is global and rational is restrained and further bounded.

The third challenge is the challenge of uneven development and under development. The nature of development through the new strategy will invariably benefit the developed areas. This is a part of market-driven development where the investment gets gravitated to the places and areas, which are conducive for rapid development. It is unfortunately true that in the whole sub-continent of South Asia, the poverty and prosperity are so distributed that there are large tracks of poverty and a few pockets of prosperity. In the given model of development, there is no scope or space for deliberate or conscious policy intervention. Any form of state intervention has come to be believed as negation of competition. How does the state and its administrative apparatus cope with this new challenge remains to be seen.

The fourth challenge would be the challenge of social strife emanating from varied identities, which are acquiring a new lease of life. The overall under development causes discontent, which manifests itself through various forms of social tensions. South Asia is fertile for such endemic conflicts. These conflicts have been handled till now through policy packages to the neglected sections, or providing direct relief to the suffering, or initiating several growth measures in the backward areas or creating new units of decision-making and so on. This was possible as there has been administrative manoeuvrability. The new context takes away this initiative and public policy space. In the absence of the policy space, how does administrative system cope with this challenge is a serious question.

Yet another challenge is coming from varied new social movements and also very radical movements questioning the very basis of emerging development model. These movements combine in themselves questions of material and spiritual deprivation. They get mixed up and the point of convergence is not

easy to see. There is a danger of the political system reducing the new articulation into 'law and order' question. This leads to greater role for coercive apparatus calling for more and more repressive laws. Governance with the help of repressive laws may be rule by laws but it is not rule of law. For repressive laws at once make the authority arbitrary. Arbitrary exercise of power will lack legitimacy. Therefore, the movements call for greater capability and creativity. Where from these strengths will come is not very clear. Will the political systems in South Asia develop such capabilities is one question and do they have any alternative means to enhance the administrative capability to cope with the new challenges is yet another important question.

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## 18.5 STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE CAPABILITIES

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There can be certain measures initiated to enhance the overall bureaucratic capability. The following strategies can be considered:

- Changing the values and attitudes;
- Changing the procedures and processes;
- Changing the perceptions of the purpose; and
- Using the latest technology.

The first suggestion that the attitudes and values of the bureaucratic personnel are so rooted that they work either through hierarchical authority or external pressure. This delivers the goods up to a point. Authority exceeding the limits is counter-productive. Instead the question of making the work a source of meaning to their very existence can have more significant impact. It is generally seen that those who work hard are the ones who enjoy their work. How to make the work meaningful and enjoyable is a measure that needs serious consideration.

The second measure that is important is simplification of the processes and procedures to ensure accountability in public life. In fact, the process has come to dominate the name of accountability. The wide spread corruption is an evidence of the fact that all that goes in the name has not much of force. Procedures by themselves will not be accountability. It is a fact that greater commitment to larger social surer guarantee for integrity than procedural rigmarole.

The third measure should be the very orientation of the whole bureaucratic system towards the purpose - be it rapid growth or social justice. It should be participative wherein those who are in charge of implementation are also the conscious participants of the policy formulation. They should own the policy and have a sense of belonging to the system. The entire personnel administration should be geared towards purpose oriented administration.

The fourth measure should aim at tapping of new technologies. This, of course, should be done very consciously. Technology is also a social relationship. Therefore incorporation of technology should see to it that the new organisational culture is internalised. Given the judicious mix of use of technologies and comparability of human sensibilities, it should be possible to enhance the bureaucratic capabilities.

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## 18.6 ACTIVITY

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1. Try to find out what are the limitations of bureaucratic organisations in your country.
2. Suggest measures for enhancing the bureaucratic capabilities in your country.

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## 18.7 CONCLUSION

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The bureaucracy plays a very important role in bringing all round development as the government is expected to regulate the economy so as to bringing about an increase in production, a high level of employment, moderate prices to commodities and check over monopolies and unhealthy trade practices. Its role requires commitment to human and constitutional values and national objectives, to service of the people and to the professional ethics and etiquette. In this connection the measures have to enhance the overall bureaucratic capabilities such as the values and attitudes, procedures and process, and judicious mix and use of technology and human sensibilities.

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## 18.8 FURTHER READINGS

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