

MANPOWER PLANNING

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The manpower of any country is the most sacred and important asset which if groomed and nurtured properly, makes the nation great. There are many examples in History and even around us today where the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of a country's labour force set the country's pace of development. The famous economist, Adam Smith said, "Whatever be the soil, climate and extent of territory of any nation, its progress and growth will particularly depend upon two factors—the proportion of its people engaged in useful occupations and their knowledge and skill". In this context then, the development of human resources and their proper development are of overriding importance anywhere and everywhere. These are of particular significance to Pakistan, because the country's economy is to be properly balanced between agricultural and industrial; and also because we are aiming at attaining per capita income somewhat comparable to those of developed countries.

"Manpower Requirements and their Planning" is a vast subject and a lot of work—at least paper work—has been done on this. A number of papers have been written, a lot of seminars held and even a 'National Manpower Council' was formed in 1962, which included its objectives as:

- (a) formulation of national policy for the conservation, training, development and effective utilization of manpower;
- (b) devising of overall programmes for high level personnel, training of artisans and skilled manpower and productive employment of surplus labour;
- (c) drawing of schemes for improved utilization of labour through better management, the co-ordination of defence and civilian uses of manpower and the development of basic data and analysis of manpower planning; and
- (d) harmonising the functions of various agencies in an unified programme.

It had three specialized bodies to assist which consisted of 1. National Training Board. 2. High Level Personnel Committee, and 3. Civil Works Board.

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The fact remains that un-employment, under-employment and unbalances in the supply and demand relationship particularly in skilled trades continues to plague the development of Pakistan today even more than a decade ago. In 1971, a joint report put up by UN Development Programme & International Labour Organization declared that the National Manpower Council had failed to tackle the problems and get anywhere near the objectives set. It is not the purpose of this paper to find faults—though with such wide ranging and all-encompassing objectives—the task was extremely difficult if not impossible right from the beginning. Also as usual in such programmes, most of the studies were desk studies. Proper research to suit our conditions was not made and arm-chair solutions to be implemented by bureaucracy were planned. Also the mechanics to feed back data to measure progress was lacking or very ineffective. On a similar situation in Tanzania, Mr. Robert L. Thomas observed “An essential element in carrying out a manpower programme is the development of pertinent research. Some is needed to provide benchmarks and measurement of progress being made in the programme, or to detect unexpected developments. Research is also needed in connection with exploration of new, better or cheaper methods of doing things in the field of training or education or in anticipation of possible changes in the financial situation for development or needs to accelerate output”.

OBJECTIVES

In this paper, it is proposed only to highlight some of the serious problems being faced by engineering and consumer industries. Some remedies are suggested, primarily as assessed by an Engineer, to generate discussion and arrive at final conclusions.

In Pakistan, we have to contend with conflicting requirements of a competitive industry and abundant population. Huge manpower necessitates that we abandon ideas and devices aimed at labour-saving; while extremely tough competition on national & international levels forces us to produce goods economically in both consumer and agricultural sector. While all the energies and efforts should be directed towards material saving for industrial production, particularly on items needing imported materials and thus costing foreign exchange, we must keep in mind that right traditions must be set from the beginning—because bad habits are difficult to abandon and bad practices are difficult to erase. Corrective measures later create labour unrest. And let us accept right in the beginning that our industry—both in public and private sectors—is extremely inefficient.

Out of all problems—political, economic, industrial with which Pakistan is beset today—Manpower and Labour problems hold the primary and central

position and thus need resolving earliest to avoid contradictions later on. To outline the dimensions of this problem properly it needs to be viewed from all the different angles of a worker, technician, technocrat and industrialist.

INDUSTRIAL LABOUR

Confining ourselves to the industrial problems, the labour in our country in 90% of the cases is employed as raw, unskilled and continues to work in that capacity for most of their life. This routine, monotonous, seemingly unimportant cycle continues and hardly 5% of this work force has the opportunity, initiative and drive to improve its lot. Consider the apathy, plight and hopelessness of this lot which hardly earns enough to keep the body and soul together, which has no chance to educate their children, has no hope likely to be fulfilled and which has to live with the horrifying thought that their children will have to be resigned to the same pattern of living. The latest labour policy is only a step in the right direction. Many such steps will be necessary before it is fully cured.

TECHNICIANS

Next is the 'Supervisory Force' being produced from our Polytechnics in different branches like electrical, mechanical, automobile etc. This cadre has a very important link in any industry or factory, but it hardly understands its functions, responsibilities and position and is unfortunately extremely ill-equipped to discharge these even if it understands. The fault is not mostly theirs but of the system—educational and vocational—through which they have to undergo. A very small percentage is interested enough in the job to forge ahead on their own, make a mark and master the situation.

TECHNOCRATS

After that is the 'Management Cadre', or 'Technocrats', the graduate engineers produced by different universities. They are expected to provide guidance on the technical and productive problems and translate management policies into action. It is a distressing but unfortunate fact that majority finds themselves woefully incompetent to evaluate the problems, to guide the technicians and even to appreciate their responsibilities. Consequently, they continue to drift along. Again, very rarely the individual is to blame.

EMPLOYERS OR INDUSTRIALISTS

The industrialists are primarily interested in their profits. All books and principles of Management under Capitalist System accept the 'profit-motive' as the moving force for the investment of Capital.

'Development of the Country', 'Helping the Country' 'Philanthropic Motive' are all there, but come very much down the line. Accepting this principle then, an industrialist will employ a man who delivers the goods and pay proportionately. Even this is acceptable, but where they have failed is the creation of institutions, building of facilities and investing in projects where people can be guided and moulded to deliver the goods in a better, effective and constantly improving fashion. That is where they have failed miserably.

REASONS

There are many reasons for the sub-standard products produced :—

First, a lot of boys join engineering colleges and polytechnics—not because they are interested in the technical education but as they find nothing better to do. They go to engineering colleges because they are intelligent and secured good marks and hence decided to become engineers. They go to Polytechnics as after matriculation instead of letting them rot, their parents make all sacrifices hoping to provide them better opportunities than clerks.

The National Training Board in the sixties advised to establish a number of Polytechnics without caring to say how and where these boys are going to be used, the net result is that people who are given expensive training for jobs they do not get—or may not want—constitute in some measure a waste of scarce educational resources, which might otherwise have been used more productively to foster development and to create employment.

It is evident, therefore, that the planning process includes much more than simply designing a plan; it includes the very important business of carrying it out, of implementing it, of evaluating how things are going, and of modifying the original plan as circumstances require.

Second is the indifferent attitude of professors and lecturers in these institutions—who impart this education as a matter of routine but infuse neither inspiration nor interest. Quite a number of these lecturers consider it only as a stepping-stone or stop-gap arrangement. This is most discouraging. I am certainly not branding all teachers under this category. But even a twenty per cent inclusion like this can be very bad.

Also the professors and lecturers have very little knowledge of actual conditions and problems of industry. This is because they associate very little with these problems. In more industrialized countries like Britain, America, Canada etc. most of the professors are consultants to different industrial concerns and hence are always alive to the actual problems. However, both these factors are the results of the system enveloping us.

Then also our engineers—fresh graduates and polytechnic turn-out—lack basic knowledge of machines, instruments and practical aspects of engineer-

ing. Like the defective instructions method in other branches of education, here also the students are interested to pass only the examination. This results in lack of confidence in the Supervisory Staff to understand, guide and instruct the men under their charge and in the management cadre to comprehend, inspire and initiate change and improvement.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Some suggestions are presented tentatively, because many aspects and details need to be brought out to make them practical and effective :—

1. Educational

- (i) Board of Secondary Education must evolve a system, on the National Scale, to grade students on the basis of their ability and aptitude and guide them into suitable channels of university and professional education. To achieve this purpose, standards will have to be laid down for students to qualify for university education.
- (ii) It is also important that Government should heavily subsidise university education. We need carefully planned and realistic system of awarding scholarships to academically capable students whose parents cannot afford to send them to universities.
- (iii) For degree and diploma engineers, it is imperative that they improve their practical knowledge. This could be brought about by compulsory and paid practical work during their holidays. This work should be properly supervised by lecturers/professors. It should carry effective marks towards eventual degree/diploma. If necessary, the duration of theoretical courses may be decreased to lay greater emphasis on this and provide more time on the machines.
- (iv) For teachers, particularly in professional and scientific fields, facilities and incentives should be provided for research and, more important, for keeping themselves fully informed of latest development, advances, etc. in their own subjects. This aspect has been woefully neglected so far.
- (v) Before we open more Polytechnics, we should give very serious thought to the task of improving and rationalising the syllabi in these institutions. Regular practical work in factories—say one or two days every week—should form part of the curriculum. Government and privately owned factories can easily provide this facility.

- (vi) A rational assessment on long term basis must be established to regulate supply and demand. In most developing countries, from Nigeria to Malaya, there are expensive institutions turning out young men who cannot find employment in an economy with extremely little modern industry and a rural economy which will employ cheap labour or no labour at all. Most investment in educative services directly aimed at increasing production and economic opportunity might well set in train a number of much more beneficial results.

2. Employment Problem

To do away with unemployment of the unskilled manpower, large-size rural work programmes have to be started. Roads, canals, small and cheap houses may be constructed on community basis—the Chinese have provided many examples in this and the results and benefits are so encouraging that certain barriers may have to be demolished to attain these. Similarly Mineral Development is another field needing such treatment. Good research work and plans are available and fortunately the Government is giving this a high priority.

3. Training within Industry

For the work force, in factories—public and private—extensive and effective means for training within the industry must be undertaken. This is to increase skill and knowledge—to help in advancing their careers, to make them more efficient and generally to inculcate a technical atmosphere around them so that their children know better and enter the world with a certain positive background. Government as well industrialists are duty bound and have a moral obligation to introduce this and where already introduced utilise it effectively and usefully. This in itself is a subject that needs more than a paper to bring out all aspects.

4. Generalist vs. Specialist

Another very important factor is the fact that in Pakistan in every walk of life, a Generalist is preferred over a Specialist. In the modern world, to improve and advance, the Specialist has got to be handed over decision-making authority in each and every sphere. This conflict of Specialist and Generalist is not only between Engineer and C.S.P. or Doctor and a Section Officer; even within the same field just like an E.N.T. Specialist and a Neuro-Surgeon are competent to say the last word in their areas; an irrigation engineer cannot and should not talk about power generation or industrial production. Mr. R. Gregoire, a former Director of European Productivity Agency, wrote :

“Today, it is essential that the technocrats should be associated with the policy-makers at the preparatory stage (of planning) and when the basic decisions are taken to avoid plans from complete failure”.

5. Dignity of Labour

Once this principle is accepted, new vistas are opened in the pattern of society and social fabric. This means firstly, that economic disparities must be eliminated to a great extent in different spheres of activity. Secondly, dignity of labour—and from labour, I do not mean only factory worker—but a *dhobi*, *mochi* and postman must be considered and accepted at the same level socially as an engineer, doctor or civil servant. And once these self-created disparities are torn down, specialization must be pushed on and boosted to the maximum possible limit to move the country into the ranks of self-respecting, self-relying and self-depending countries.

6. Designers and Tool Makers

Talking about specialization, I may be permitted to do a little shop talk. In the engineering industry particularly and in other industries generally, if we have to progress, we must initiate measures to generate designers and tool-makers. These two categories are the backbone of progress and development. These two categories are in short supply all over the world and they are pathetically short in Pakistan. To produce good designers and toolmakers, a lot of investment in talent, time and money has to be made and even then the yield in highly industrialized countries is 25—50%. We have to expect even lesser yield. Nevertheless, there is no short-cut to it. Realising all the pitfalls and dangers, we have to make the jump.

7. Development

Also we have to accept the realities of the situation. We have a huge, unemployed unskilled force. We know and all studies indicate that capable and competent technicians and technocrats are the crying need of the hour. And paradoxically, we have engineers and diploma-holders in thousands all over Pakistan, looking for jobs. This clearly points out to two factors :

(a) Lack of Planning

It is obvious that Government and its concerned departments have neither any idea of the number of boys qualifying every year from these Polytechnics and Universities nor organizational skill and knowledge which can utilize natural resources and manpower potential to blend them into wealth and strength of the country.

(b) Stage by stage Development

We must accept the fact that revolutions can be brought about but Industrial Revolution is essentially an Evolutionary Process. The economy has to go from Agricultural into Cottage Industry, Consumer Industry, Heavy Industry and Sophisticated Industry. The stages can be bridged but cannot be jumped.

We must make plans and organizations which are feasible. We must draw inspiration and learn from mistakes of countries slightly ahead of us and not from countries like America which are the ultimate in technology in certain fields. They have also gone through similar problems and experiences but eighty to hundred years ago.

8. Simple Virtues

We as 'Engineers' must endeavour to start simple and austere living and hard work. A wise man once said, 'There is no short-cut to experience'. I would like to add, 'There is no substitute to hard work'. I accept that these are high-sounding words, everybody is doing his best and in any case these qualities are infused by leadership. But the dangers are so great and stakes so high that even reminding ourselves of this all the time is worth it.

Lastly, brother Engineers, I genuinely believe that Engineers and Scientists have greater responsibilities and are the only class to bring about changes for the betterment of the country. Engineers and Scientists by their training and approach are unafraid to tread unknown and new territories for their problems against say a lawyers or civil-servants, who have always to look back for references to solve a problem or situation. In fact, an Engineer should and is always making new ground and the world today is the greatest proof and tribute to that.