STRENGTHENING HUMAN CAPITAL THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING: CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

High quality effective human capital can contribute to the progress and prosperity of the organization they represent. The last decade (in India) had witnessed a fall in the quality of service delivery of public institutions often termed as ‘poor governance and inefficient administration’. This along with the rising currents of globalization necessitated new direction for reforms – in which capacity building and training assumes greater significance. Capacity Building efforts must attend to both the organizational capacity building and also the professional and skill upgradation of individuals associated with the implementation of Govt. programmes.

Against this backdrop, the present article examines and evaluates the Capacity building and training initiatives taken by the Govt- an effective tool for strengthening human capital in the public sector. The paper highlights the issues in the implementation Of the Kerala State Training Policy(STP), challenges and options. The micro level evaluation studies indicate scope for major improvements. Accepting the fact that policies like STP aimed at improving governance by strengthening civil service can bring about changes in quality of service delivery, the same has to be supported by “New Public Management’ which replaces the traditional bureaucratic rule orientation to result oriented goals. Capacity building for good governance involves an investment in human capital. Other enabling factor contributing to good governance also need to addressed with strong state support if the ROI (return on investment ) is to be fully realized to achieve the desired goals of good governance.
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Introduction
It has been widely accepted that the first essential to good governance is the quality of human capital. Good Governance and strong institutions are necessary to foster economic growth. The efficiency and effectiveness of public institutions in turn depend, on their service delivery mechanism and the supportive framework of rules and procedures which enable the bureaucracy to discharge their functions in a citizen centric and responsive manner. This requires highly committed, effective human capital which can undertake and implement policies and programmes of the Govt. Efforts for strengthening human capital in public sector through capital building and training were initiated in India from the beginning of Five Year Plans.

This paper examines the capacity building and training efforts taken by the Govt. of India to improve civil service and strengthen governance. Some state level initiatives including State Training Policy (STP) which is being implemented in the State of Kerala in India aimed at strengthening human capital, its challenges and options have also been discussed.

Civil Service in India
Since 1990 the civil service in India has undergone radical transformation. In India, it is the political executive (responsible to the legislative) who decides policies and programmes of Govt. in tune with the national priorities and goals. These programmes are implemented by the civil servants who by virtue of their training and professional experience are well versed in the functioning of Govt. (Tenth Report of ARC, 2008). The civil service in India comprising of about 6.4 million employees ensure that the service delivery mechanism is efficient and effective to meet the changing demands of large and diverse population. Their contribution has been acknowledged in the assessment report of the World Bank (World Development Report 1997): “The strength of the civil service in India has its extraordinary pool of skills and talents, its field experience, its extensive
networking, its appreciation and overview of the functioning of the Govt. at the cutting edge, its understanding of delivery systems for development, awareness, of the formal and informal socio economic networks in the field, its ‘can deliver’, attitude, its ready adaptability to new and unfamiliar situation and tasks and its social orientation.

However, over the years, the role of the functionaries in promoting good governance has been severely criticized from various quarters. They have often been blamed for poor governance and ineffective administration. Critics are of the view that the Govt. in the last 54 years have failed to put in place the foundation of work excellence, work ethics and culture. Money earmarked for development schemes and projects remain unspent or get siphoned off for unproductive purposes, with leakages and rampant corruption- all which have resulted in poor-credibility of public services. It is apt to quote Planning Commission (2007), ‘the real development issue is not dearth of funds but use of budgetary resources productively for the planned purpose.’

The various Committees and Administrative Reforms Commissions(ARC) appointed from time to time have examined the matter in detail and the suggestions were made for reforming the civil services. However majority of these were not implemented in its true letter and spirit or remained in papers. Among the various reform initiatives proposed, capacity building and training plays a key role.

**Concept of Capacity Building and Training**

In todays’ fast changing world, with growing competition, it is important for public institutions to meet the essentials of good governance as well as develop competence in their working using new IT driven mechanism. The knowledge, skill and attitude of civil servants will determine the success at various level. Either the civil servants are to be trained or re-skilled to match the new trends. The shift to decentralized planning through Panchayat Raj Institutions in India and especially in the State of Kerala called for massive strengthening and capacity building of human capital. Capacity building for good governance which is the most crucial catalyst for development involves an investment in human capital. The workshop held in January
1998 on ‘Key Themes of priorities for Governance & Capacity building’ (quoted Minocha, 2006) concluded with the remark that ‘the issues of governance and capacity building are the centre of many of the most pressing challenges confronting countries throughout the Asia and Pacific region’. Capacity building has been used widely by development specialists emphasizing on the efforts to improve performance of public institutions and its functionaries. Capacity building as defined by Peter Morgas(1998) refers to ‘the ability of individuals, groups, institutions and organizations to identify and solve development problems overtime’. Capacity building implies developing a system of coordinated and interdependent activities of the public organization with broad array of actions and processes required to sustain development. Narrowly it has been defined as developing and sustaining the specific skills required by individuals of public institutions. Operationally capacity building can be defined as the ability to perform appropriate tasks effectively and is often equated with the training of human resources (Hooja 2006).

Even though training is not a panacea for all the ills of civil service, its role in strengthening human capital cannot be ignored. Training has been defined as ‘a planned process to modify attitude, knowledge or skill behaviour through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose in the work situation, is to develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy current and future needs of the organisation’. It should start right from recruitment of an employee and continue till he retires from service. It should complement the employees’ education by updating his knowledge inculcating appropriate skills and values for performing tasks/function thereby changing the entrenched mind sets. (GOI, ARC 2008).

**National Training Policy- A Capacity Building Initiative**

The ARC had stressed from time to time the need for strengthening human capital by foregrounding HRD functions in Govt. sector through appropriate education and training. A major initiative, in this regard was taken by the Government Of India in 1996 when the National Training Policy (NTP) was approved. The policy stresses on the importance of training as one of the effective and tested tools for “performance improvement” as well
as upgradation of knowledge and skills of the personnel which can lead to organizational effectiveness.

The NTP aimed at’ **training for all’** spells out the objective s of training as

a) updation of knowledge and skill for better performance,

b) promoting understanding of professional requirements as well as sensitize to socio-economic and political environment in which work is done

c) bringing about right attitudinal orientation.

The Policy guidelines also stipulates that the training programmes should focus on responsiveness, commitment and other essential factors of good governance. It should be imparted to all rungs of civil service starting from the lowest and cutting edge level to the highest in policy making. However even after a decade many State Governments are yet to have their own State Training Policies.

**Kerala’s Human Development-A Profile**

Kerala is a relatively small state in the south west corner of India. Kerala’s human development index is a glowing reflection of the State’s developmental achievement. The State’s progress in key areas of education and health, cent percent literacy and higher levels of education among women equates it to some of the most developed countries in the world. (Economic Review 2008) A central feature of Kerala’s development experience is the role of education. However in spite of these remarkable achievements, the last decade had witnessed lag in economic growth and employment, thereby causing concern for the policymakers and the State to channelise the resources on the scale needed to sustain the ‘Kerala Model of Development’. (Kerala’s HRD, 2005).The MGP Policy document (2002) had summarized the problems that the State faces as (1) decline in the performance of public service system (2) the breakdown of the finances of the State. This situation over the past several years has only led to public perception about civil service as negative. The study conducted by the Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore (2002) on “The State of Kerala’s Public Services: Benchmarks for the Millennium’ had thrown up key issues relating to various essential services like public health, education,
transportation, public distribution system, etc and had concluded that the States’ civil services as in other parts of the country are perceived to have fallen behind in meeting the society’s need. This calls for urgent policy action as well as advocacy. This situation can be the outcome of the interplay of a multiplicity of factors rather than owing to a specific casual factor. A major reason, as pointed out by ARC 2008 for the deterioration in the quality of public service is the lack of training at the pre-service and in-service levels. When in the past, the employees used to learn from their peers and superiors, now it is mostly performed by trial and error often resulting in delay, inaction or loss to the States’ exchequer owing to wrong decision taken by an uninformed official. It was in this context that the State Govt. took the landmark decision of implementing the State Training Policy as part of Asian Development Banks’, Modernizing Government Programme (MGP) in 2004.

State Training Policy (STP) - Salient Features
Kerala is one among the very few States in India to have implemented the STP (STP document 2004). The policy document states “

Training is an obligation of the State Govt. towards its employees. The mission is to transform each and every employee in Govt. Department and its agencies into fully developed, duty conscious, development-oriented, well behaved, competent and motivated members of work teams who are committed to the promotion of public welfare. This implies training in all relevant efficiency enhancing technologies aimed at gearing towards promoting continuous innovation as part of a relentless pursuit of total quality in governance’.

It envisages the following major outcomes;

- Building a competent and professional civil service.
- Developing indicators in the form of published and accepted norms of civil service standards, well defined Ratings of public Services and work standards with respect to Client needs and demands” and
- Reduction in complaints/pending cases and resolution of cases/decision making on a time bound manner.
MGP document also envisaged that within a period of three years there should be 40% improvement in the level of public services as measured by user satisfaction surveys (experienced by at least 60% of those surveyed).

The STP document states that training would be imparted to all rungs of the civil service starting from the lowest operating level where the focus would be on functional skill and attitudinal orientation. The second level comprising of supervisory level would focus on extracting work from others involving coordination, coaching, counseling skills, interpersonal skills and a role model function. The third is the middle management/administrative level which would concentrate on professional excellence, leadership and a good perception of interrelated issues. The top level of the civil service needs professional training for policy analysis, strategic planning lateral thinking and policy formulation.

The training framework includes induction training at the time of entry into service, in-service training at suitable intervals during career progression, promotion linked training, short duration exposure seminars when any major development in a sector takes place and also re-skilling consequent to redeployment of employees.

**Operational Structure**

The mammoth task of *training all* the 4.5 lakh employees of the State within a span of 2-3 years has been vested with the apex training Institute in the State ie’ Institute of Management In Government(IMG). IMG has been given the key responsibility for implementing STP. Each department would earmark 0.25 % of the plan budget for training which would be pooled and entrusted to IMG. The Department would also designate a senior officer as the Training Manager who would liaise with IMG and prepare and plan a road map for capacity building and performance improvement of the Department.

A monitoring mechanism consisting of head of the department and the training Institute, faculty members and representatives of the Dept would oversee and evaluate the progress and quality of the capacity building efforts.
STP Implementation-Challenges And Key Issues

The implementation of STP has resulted in a paradigm shift from the conventional training to focused need based training. The first year itself had a quantum leap in the number of programmes from 290 in 2003-04 to 1202 in 2004-05. In order to achieve this, the services of Govt. servants, private sector and the civil society were utilized and persons with a flair for training and good communication skills were selected and the capacity of these ‘trainers on call’ were upgraded. To begin with, in the first year 17 major departments were selected for inclusion under STP. Later on more departments have been brought under the STP umbrella.

The STP model details a very systematic approach to training that involves the key competent functionaries of the Department and other stakeholders also in the process of identifying training needs, designing courses and its implementation. A detailed Training Needs Analysis (TNA) was conducted by IMG faculty with the help of a core group of domain experts from the departments concerned. The Thames Valley training package on ‘TNA Toolkit’ which is being recommended by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Government of India is taken as the base and was customized to suit the requirements of the Govt. sector. In this exercise, each and every activity/scheme taken up by the Dept. is scanned in the context of the Department’s vision and mission. The job charts are examined, the actual performance of the employee is assessed and compared with the expected standards /level of performance at work place. Gaps, if any are identified and reasons for these ‘performance deficiencies ‘are scientifically assessed. The causes of these gaps are further categorized into ‘training and non-training related issues’. (A few common examples of non training issues are poor planning of schemes, lack of motivation among functionaries, delay in release of funds, etc). The non-training interventions which are identified to be addressed are reported to the department and the Govt. for taking necessary action, while the training needs identified are further prioritized to prepare training plans for the department for a period of two to three years so as to cover the entire staff. The course for each level of employee is meticulously designed and run at the district level. The courses are coordinated by trained
departmental coordinators (DCs) who are specifically trained by IMG for this purpose. Thus the entire training process is decentralized with central control and monitoring resting with IMG.

Though the process of STP started in 2004, and the number of courses conducted increased five fold, no serious attempt has been taken so far to evaluate its impact in terms of outcome/performance improvement and improved governance. The first years’ tempo could not be sustained in subsequent years for various reasons and this has mainly led to dilution and deterioration in the quality of programmes offered under STP. However, a few departmental level studies were undertaken by IMG to assess the impact of training on the employees and their performance. The methodology used by IMG had mainly focused on the impact of the capacity building initiative at four levels ie, course end evaluation, performance improvement at the job level and the organizational level and finally its utility to the stakeholders at large in terms of improved service delivery. Qualitative information on these was gathered through interviews, focus group discussion, opinion surveys etc.

The course end evaluation on training using the Immediate Reaction Questionnaire (IRQ) showed that 79% of the trainees reported that the courses were very effective and had contributed to the overall improvement. Critics feel that this is not always seen reflected in their performance or attitude at workplace The drawback of this questionnaire is that the trainees assess the trainers, their delivery skills, infrastructural facilities etc. There is no mechanism to measure whether the learning has taken place or the trainees have acquired the necessary knowledge and skill as stated in the training objectives((like test, quiz or project work). Transfer of learning to work situation becomes difficult in some cases as the trainees are posted elsewhere and they never get an opportunity to apply what they have learned. Training at the training institute need to be supplemented with ‘on the job training’ which is yet to happen. As suggested by ARC, officials should be evaluated after the training, suitably posted and the learning should be given weightage for further promotions.
At the Department level, the opinion survey and discussions held with the reporting officers of the trainees revealed that there is significant change in knowledge and skill level after the training. A few evaluation studies show that there is modest impact in some cases on the work performance. It is worth mentioning that the training imparted to the Sales Tax Officials of the Taxes Dept. in Kerala was reported as very fruitful with an overall increase in the States’ revenue from 29% to 32% over a span of two years. Although other factors like incentives for achieving higher target etc. would have attributed to this increased revenue, the significance of training can hardly be underestimated. However there is no clear evidence to prove that performance improvement at the organization level has taken place merely because of the capacity building initiative. It is also remarked that a ‘change in mindset’ resulting from training lasts only for a short period and could not be sustained.

However, the major drawback as pointed out by experts is that intensive functional training for specialized categories is lacking in Govt.

The forth level evaluation showed that wide variations exist among the departments across different regions. The stakeholders’ perception on the quality of service delivery in Treasury Dept. was extremely positive. Here besides systematic need based training, other related issues were sorted out and facilities including infrastructure etc were modernized and the operations of Dept. have been fully computerized. Such a positive response was not reported by the citizens in many other Departments as many of the systemic problems remained unaddressed even after 2to 3 years.

Though minute details relating to performance problems are examined and analysed while doing the TNA, some of the departments still have failed to address the ‘real training need’. Though departments are expected to review and update the training needs, course contents etc. this is not done systematically and seriously every year. Inputs from experts in the field and the departmental heads concerned are to be incorporated in the training module.
Non-training interventions as evolved during the TNA exercise have not been address seriously by the Government. Unless these two issues – training and non-training are addressed simultaneously, the capacity building effort may be a wasteful exercise in the long run.

There is ample evidence to prove that the quality of the courses run by Departmental officials are not up to mark as they are not ‘professional trainers’. Most of these DCs perform the training function as an additional responsibility along with their routine functions. Absence of qualified master trainers with sufficient experience and expertise in domain areas pose a real problem. There is a dearth of good trainers at district levels and hence more trainers need to be developed and a Trainer’s Directory is to be prepared at the district level along with digitized course materials, which can be used as a ready reckoner for reference.

Absence of a ‘Training database’ of employees at the Department level is yet another issue. Such a database is a pre requisite for successful implementation of STP. This will cater to the information needs at macro as well as micro level and also help in collecting maintaining analyzing and, reporting information of trainees and their work requirements on a regular basis

Measuring the impact of training is rather a difficult task even in the private sector. At the Govt. level the functions are not well defined and there are no bench marks which makes it difficult to quantify the work done. The key deliverables at each functionary level is crucial and currently the absence of measurable performance indicators makes it difficult to distinguish between poor and outstanding performance. The performance assessment system which is in vogue is a topic of hot debate always and is not linked to learning this has led to lack of interest in training among employees. The 6th Pay Commission has recommended Performance Related Incentive System in Government (PRIS) as an incentive to recognize outstanding performers. It is high time that training should be made mandatory at all levels and a policy towards performance linked
promotion is put in place and successful completion of training is to be given weightage for career progression and should find a place in the service book of the officer.

Training is a top-driven activity and frequent changes in management and leadership has resulted in lack of interest to training. Even the ARC had made observations that both the Departments and employees attach minimal value to training. Due to immediate organizational needs, best officers are not often spared for training which means only ‘sparable’ get trained frequently. Not nominating the ‘right person for the right training’ devalues the training mechanism. Again, often the hard budget constraints faced by the Govt. for meeting the new challenges force them to cut down on HR activities and especially training in the Govt. sector. This is because training is often considered as the least priority area as the positive results cannot always be correlated to training efforts alone. There is generally a tendency among officers to attend training programmes which are of direct relevance to their work and least preference is given to topics of national and international significance like climate change, recession and economic growth etc.

The quality of training is very importance because poor quality training would result in lack of interest of trainees in the training. There is a need for evolving new innovative delivery mechanism for making the courses interesting. Several creative and IT based training tools are now been tried and tested out as part of STP. More case studies and games relevant to the course need to be developed for use in training programmes. The capacities of training institutions need to encompass new technologies besides the traditional classroom training, which is now being tried out by IMG.

There are around 92 small training institutes in the State attached to various Govt. departments which function to cater to the needs of their officials. There is no effective system so far for networking and sharing of knowledge and resources among others, often leading to duplication of courses and wastages of resources. A discussion with all training institutes of the State at the time of planning courses for the year has to be formalized and institutionalized by the Govt. before transferring funds to these institutes.
Shift to the E-training mode

While e-learning programmes have steadily grown in the West both in variety of course content and delivery media, it has been somewhat slow in the State. Now e-learning is gaining popularity especially due to the considerable growth in e-literacy and easy broadband access.

Capitalizing on the e-literacy and other strengths of the State, IMG has now ventured into the e-training mode. This has resulted in a shift from the conventional tools and systems to knowledge portals which will provide authentic content to understand about various issues relating to development and good governance. The e-learning Course Management system of the portal enables the Government officials to undergo the necessary course work online and also undertake the online evaluation for certification. The e-Learning portal will be supplemented by interactive sessions through Video Conferencing. There will be online message board, discussion forum, collaboration and chatting facility for the participants. The portal can also be used for quick reference by the officials and the trainees. On-line Expert Advisory Services provides a platform to post specific queries or questions connected to the subject that are generally not covered in FAQ section of the portal. The experts authorized (faculty of IMG) for answering the questions can log into the portal and view the questions and can provide answer through e-mail. The answers are recorded in the portal for everyone to access as a searchable compilation of question answers under different headings. All previously answered queries are openly archived with search facilities for anyone visiting the portal to access and study. The faculty could provide training materials in the portal and assign case studies to different groups in advance. Another form ie, the visual media based programs which is also one of the most effective medium for information dissemination and training –will also be introduced soon.

With the introduction of this, a self motivated employee can acquire a new skill or knowledge by taking web-based self-study course and complete it on his own without depending on a training institute and its associated costs This e-training it is hoped will be cost effective, can increase the outreach, cover more number of trainees, and sort out
many of the existing problems of STP at the field level making capacity building efforts more meaningful.

Conclusion
The rising currents of globalization along with the prevailing weakness of the civil services has necessitated new direction for reforms – in which capacity building and training assumes greater significance Capacity Building efforts must attend to both the organizational capacity building and also the professional and skill upgradation of individuals associated with the implementation of Govt. programmes.

The micro level evaluation studies indicate scope for major improvements. The success of the capacity building efforts depends on a host of enabling factors being put in place. Any initiative taken by the Govt. for strengthening human capital can achieve the envisioned outcome, only with strong State support. Strategies and appropriate focused interventions for addressing issues of the civil service coupled with systematic implementation of capacity building efforts can go a long way in improving governance and strengthening human capital in the State.

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