

Transforming decision-making from rule to role-based is one of the objectives of Mission Karmayogi.

Commonly, administrative roles are connected to the positions (posting) administrators occupy as they progress in their careers. In rule-based roles, decision-making, in the words of Paul Appleby, is conceived to be a “mechanical, merely technical, unvarying” activity, leading to “wholly scientific or technical and wholly right decisions”.

On the other hand, role-based decision-making focuses on the process used by administrators to make decisions in different situations.

The most common process is the typical bureaucratic way flowing from the ideas of Max Weber. The steps in this process are — bureaucrats identify a goal based on public interest, make an exhaustive list of all possible courses of action with their consequences, and decide on a course of action that is most likely to lead to goal achievement.

Role-based decision-making in Mission Karmayogi

The assumptions that administrators know and are able to determine a goal based on public interest; politics has no role in decision-making, and policy-making is separate from implementation.

This process of conventional decision-making is found to be slow, costly, ineffective and unable to respond to unforeseen changes. To get over this, administrators reduce the extent of analysis by examining only a limited number of alternative courses of action.

Issues are addressed individually rather than in a holistic manner, no visionary goals are set, and the objective is to give small solutions to what are largely more complex problems.

When new problems arise, these are addressed through a new round of incremental decision-making. This short-term focus leads to faster and

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more politically relevant decision-making. This is called the incremental way of making decisions.

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Administrators also introduce an element of long-term by following a mixed-method, which consists of setting a larger goal and then using incremental actions to achieve

short-term objectives. In this way, the incremental process acquires a long-term vision.

The pragmatism of incremental decision-making is based on the ‘principle of bounded rationality’ developed by Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon. The premise is that reality is complex and cannot be completely understood by any human brain; therefore, capacity to solve problems is also limited. As a result, human beings satisfice — settle for a course of action that is ‘good enough’ for the purposes at hand.

The conventional and the



DR. SAMEER SHARMA

decision-making, administrators actively pursue the interests of a less-endowed group (e.g. tribals, differently-abled) and behave like lawyers arguing the case of their clients.

The conventional process of deciding on a course of action was overhauled in the 1970s. This is called the strategic process, and owes its origins to the private sector when managements of large corporates started to practice a strategic process in order to deal with an increasing uncertain future. The strategic process is oriented towards actions, results, and implementation.

It promotes broader and more diverse participation in the planning process, places more emphasis on understanding the external context, assumes competitive behaviour among people (and groups), and focuses on a community’s strengths and

weaknesses in the context of external opportunities and challenges.

Communication to change the mindsets of people is a completely different way of decision-making. The changed motivations and emotions, in turn, drive action. Administrators aim to develop a public realm in which individuals can engage in free and open communication. Public interest also becomes the interest of plural communities, which is known through communication and discourse.

Some of the processes used by administrators are — dialogue and discussion, consultation on projects during design and implementation, and the use of appropriate type of language and mediation in order to evolve consensus among individuals and groups of

people. Social media has spawned a new way of discourse and communication, having the potential to influence action by giving new meanings to information and issues.

Therefore, role-based decision-making involves knowing different ways of choosing paths of action, where all seem to be appropriate.

The selection of a particular path depends on the deep structure of assumptions, beliefs, and values held by administrators as well as requirements of the situation.

The task before the Mission Karmayogi is to build the capacity of administrators in order to empower them to choose and practice one way of being and doing over another.

(Author has a PhD from the USA and a DLitt from Kanchi University. The article is based on his research and practice and views are personal)