

The Nepal Administrative Staff College - Its Challenging Origin and Future Demands

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Abstract

The Nepal Administrative Staff College was founded in order to raise the development capacity of the national administrative workforce. The journey to its founding was a sacred journey but, like all such journeys, it was not an untrammelled one. Mr GBN Pradhan became its first Executive Director. He gives here an account of the problems he encountered. The College now seems to be well set on its course but, in his opinion, it still needs to tackle some serious problems. He concludes by suggesting certain measures that will enhance the operational efficiency of the College and enable it to better serve its clients.

Introduction

The Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) is the outcome of a long felt requirement of the Government to have a very high level public service training institution which would adequately address the training needs of its public service personnel. Time and again the issue of training used to surface in the reform programmes of the Government. As a result, the Central Training Department (CTD) was established in 1966 under the Ministry of Economic Planning to provide training to the civil servants. The CTD organised the Executive Development Programme for the senior officials of the Government, a residential course for the Chief District Officers and conducted a variety of courses for the different levels of Civil Service at Harihar Bhavan, Pulchowk. In a sense, the Central Training Department (CTD) can be said to be the forerunner/predecessor of the Nepal Administrative Staff College. The American Advisers helped the CTD in running different courses.

Of course, even before the creation of CTD, pre-service training/induction training to the seventy three newly recruited Section Officers as well as the

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shorthand, typewriting and records management, office procedures etc. training to the office assistants (non-gazetted civil servants) were organised by the training division of the Administrative Board from 1962. The UN Adviser to the training assisted in conducting non-gazetted training programmes.

A residential training course for the Chief District Officers of the Government was run for the first time in Ranga Mahal, Kathmandu by the training division of the Administrative Board.

Later, when the CTD was amalgamated with the Administrative Management Department, the status of which was raised to the level of a full fledged Ministry, the Ministry of General Administration, the training function came exclusively under this Ministry. The Training Division of the Ministry provided administrative training to the section officers and non-gazetted staff while the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) conducted training for the middle level administrators of the Nepalese Civil Service.

However, in view of the emergent need to upgrade the existing skills and competencies of the civil servants, the Government's focus became more sharper on the establishment of a national level autonomous training institution. This was also reflected in the Reports of the Administrative Reform Commissions constituted by the Government in different periods. Consequently, in June 1981, the late King Birendra in his Address to the 32nd Session of the then Rastriya Panchayat (the legislature) announced that, as part of the introduction of a new administrative reform programme, a new high level training institute would be established. Following this Address, under the Nepal Administrative Staff College Act, 1982 the Government established the Nepal Administrative Staff College to:

- ❖ provide necessary training for the employees of the Government and Public Enterprises
- ❖ identify measures for enhancing the capability of the Government administration and public enterprise management in order to support the country's development programme
- ❖ conduct problem oriented research and provide consultancy and information services with a view to preparing training materials and making training more useful.

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Apart from the above, the following basic policies also were laid down to guide the activities of the College.

- ❖ To make the training programme an integral part of the personnel administration and development programme of the Government and Public Enterprises
- ❖ To integrate the training with career development of public officials.

The College launched its first programme of training in September 27, 1982.

Challenges Confronted

Although the Government's decision to establish NASC as a premier training institution was a welcome move, it had to start from a scratch or better say from nothing. Naturally it unleashed a series of challenges and constraints on its road to development. Sitting in one of the office rooms of the Ministry of General Administration the recently retired senior Civil Servant who was appointed the Executive Director of NASC with two officers of the Ministry of General Administration deputed to NASC, had to prepare a viable and reasonably sound blue print of the College which would determine its physical infrastructure, its governing code (rules & regulations), its human resources, finance, planning, management and stratification of its training operations. This was by no means an easy task. But given one's fortitude, patience, commitment, sincerity, will-to-work, foresight, leading skills and cooperation from all, nothing became impossible though difficult, to achieve. Moreover, it is a matter of sheer coincidence that the author of this write-up has been involved in the training of the Nepalese Civil Service from the very beginning whether it was organised by the Administrative Board or by the Department of Public Administration or by the Central Training Department or by the Nepal Administrative Staff College.

Now, coming to the question of challenges in the early stages of NASC's development, the first challenge was to find out a suitable premise to house the newly created institution. Upon the recommendation of the Ministry of General Administration, the Government (Council of Ministers) granted to the College an old Rana Palace built in 1888 with its spacious compound which was acquired by the Government in 1962 (2019 B.S.) under the Land Acquisition Act. But some mischievous persons including the former owner of the Palace manipulated the documents and made an issue that the Palace was given to the Government only in Bhogbandaki (a kind of mortgage agreement) and the owner had a right to sell the Palace to a third party by paying off the money lent by the Government. On

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this ground the owner of the Palace prepared a fabricated document which showed that the owner had sold the Palace compound to a third party. The original documents concerning the acquisition of the Palace compound by the Government under Land Acquisition Act in 1962 with necessary compensation given to the owner were made missing. In the absence of acquisition records, the government had no choice but to pay the amount demanded by the party and get the ownership of the Palace and its compound for the use of the Staff College.

However, with persistent efforts by the Executive Director of the College and the then Secretary of the Ministry of General Administration, the officials (accountants) who worked in the Building Department during the period when the compensation was paid to the owner of the Palace in 1962 were fortunately identified and from them as well as by the district court deliberation records the whole story behind this Palace building became known to the College. It was simply impossible to trace out the relevant documents which were missing for so many years without the help and effort of the wonderful officials which saved so much money to the government. Actually on the basis of these documents, the College filed the case against the claim of this fictitious party and won the case in all the courts (district, zonal and regional courts) which took several years of effort and attention of the College.

Similarly, the College had to clear and get back the land occupied by the Regional office of the Roads Department, District Court of Lalitpur and also the piece of land and the part of the building stationed at the main gate of the Palace occupied illegally by a private person for over thirty years. The lesson from this is how mischievous and vicious people can do anything so wrong and can go to any extents like this to grab the government money and property.

With the end of this brief episode, another challenge came into fore. Since this old Palace building except its front facade was in a completely dilapidated condition, it needed to be rebuilt soon. The British Government gave financial assistance to renovate the front part of the building while the European Economic Commission (now the European Union) financed the entire construction of ten other buildings complex within the compound of the College. The College and the Government of Nepal recorded its deep appreciation and gratefulness for the generous assistance extended timely by the British Government and the European Union.

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Another challenge was that, pending the renovation and new construction activities going on for a couple of years, the College had to hire a private building for three years and initiated/conducted training programmes for the different level of officers of the Government and Public Enterprises with the help of local trainers who were hired from the different Government agencies, University, CEDA, public enterprises plus the two British experts who were seconded to the College to work as Deputy Executive Director and Director of Studies under the Executive Director of the College. Similarly, from time to time British and local experts were invited to run special courses or programmes of shorter duration in the College.

From the very inception, one of the fundamental concerns of the College was to find out the right kind of professional people to provide training and then to develop further their capacity to deliver effective training services to its clientele - officials of government and public enterprises. Here, again the British Government liberally offered assistance to educate and train the staff of the College at the different Universities and institutions in the U.K. As a result, almost all the staff of the College were given the opportunity to study on the different aspects of public administration and management ranging from a short training of a few months to a longer term of three year Ph.D. programme.

It is a unique instance in Nepal that the College is perhaps the only single institution where virtually the entire staff got the opportunity for overseas training and education. In the U.K. alone, out of a total of about 70 staff in the College (excluding the drivers, peons, sweepers, staff in contract and monthly wages), 8 of them received PhD degree, 20 of them got Master's degree, 6 of them got diploma and 36 of them got training of different kinds. In addition, some of the staff received training and education in other countries like India, Australia, Germany, Canada, Italy, Japan, Sri Lanka etc.

The founders of this College as well as the members of the Governing Council and the Executive Committee need to be credited for their relentless effort in developing qualified human resources in the College. It was their strong belief that the development of human capital was a cardinal factor in developing an institution like the Staff College which as a centre of excellence, needed to demonstrate its competence in the field of training, research and consulting services and also as a provider of professional advice on measures for improving public performance.

Future Demands

The College has travelled fairly a modest distance. Born in 1982, the College is now in its youthful stage where the maturity and drive can be combined to lead to its desired destination. The task, of course looks, monumental especially in the context of current overall situation of the country. But given the cooperation, commitment, patience, courage, confidence and competence, the College can create its better image, not necessarily designed to glamorize, as a progressive and dynamic institution. It can certainly develop its capacity to meet the challenges of the future, if provided a supportive environment. When I say this, I must immediately qualify my observations.

First, the human resources so energetically developed in the past seem to be gradually attracted to serve in the outside institutions which offer lucrative facilities. It is true that on the basis of the overseas educational qualification and experience earned during their stay at the College, they have become more salable in the market. For instance, out of 8 Ph.Ds. 4 of them have already deserted the College and so is the case with the overseas Master degrees holders. If this self damaging trend in the human capital continues, the College will be without the experienced and qualified manpower within a couple of years. The College has to consider seriously about this flight of the human capital and work out options to mitigate this problem.

Secondly, the College, has to focus more on an enabling environment where the staff get motivated to work and get self development opportunity and feel that there are no gross inequalities, where the sense of discipline and loyalty to the College is being enforced, where the talented, honest and sincere staff get rewarded for their superior performance, and where the miscreants and non-performers who are always intent on wrecking the institution get punished.

I have experienced even during my assignment at the College that there was a very small group and I am not sure whether there is still a small remnant of that group whose main job is not to work and contribute to the College but create discord and disturbance and lodge complaints, convey misgivings to the concerned authorities and flash out distorted and character assassination news through their allied media till their self interest is fulfilled. It has become a fashion for them to speak against the management with the change of every Minister/Secretary at the Ministry of General Administration.

Conclusion

A prestigious institution like the Staff College should continue to keep up its reputation as a professional agency for human resource development in the public service sector. It should continue to demonstrate its capacity to cater to the training and research demands of the twenty first century workforce of the government and public enterprises. This may call for a new vision, a new management style, a new relationship, a new supportive climate and a new yardstick to apply. It is, therefore, suggested that self-introspection/self analysis by the College on where it is going, what its limitations and strengths are, how it can best utilize its resources (both physical and human) and how it can improve its performance in order to serve its clientele most effectively and efficiently, may be a useful exercise in advancing the future operations of the College with tact, vigour and determination.