

# Knowing management

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ENGAGED in rapid-fire deliveries and frantic gesticulations, a few friends and acquaintances had a red-hot discussion the other evening at a get-together. Words and phrases were banded about ex cathedra, names dropped like confetti, citations were put together, umpteen bland assertions were brazenly made, many shopworn clichés were boldly tossed around, several instant evaluations were advanced, and opinions were freely mixed with facts. The discussion, in the main, concerned management, its nature, its types, and the function of managing.

I encountered during the conversation -- where there was more heat than illumination -- several misunderstandings and misgivings regarding management. Many -- so is the trend these days -- have studied or majored in management at universities and have been practitioners of management in one way or the other in different organisations, companies, sectors and subsectors. Clearly, in a discussion such as this, one needs to be selective and only a few aspects of management are pursuable, even if succinctly.

First and foremost, management is a generic and inclusive enterprise. It is, at once, a discipline, an occupation, a profession, a field of operation, and a framework or paradigm. Multidimensional, broad-based, universalising and, often, cross-cultural, management principles, concepts, categories and for-

mulations are put to use and are applicable, more or less, to wide-ranging organised human activities, i.e. public, corporate, tourism, hospital, construction, farm, defence, and so forth.

The distinction between administration and management is something one should take cognisance of. While administration is concerned with higher-level direction-setting and policy-forming functions, management relates to execution, implementation, enforcement, operation, and, generally, with getting things done with and through personnel. Public sector management and corporate/business management -- although there are noticeable similarities and the classical distinctions are increasingly getting blurred in certain respects -- are not to be confused with each other.

Specifically accountable to a resource-owning and controlling social group, corporate management is concerned principally with the extraction and maximisation of profit and investment return and pursues a specialised set of functions in order to realise corporate goals and objectives. With a much wider, deeper and diverse scope, accountability, constituency and reach, public sector management is inclusive, interdependent, problem-focused, and aggregative.

One must reject a dichotomy and a rigid boundary between the two genres of management. In reality, management is a free-flowing continuum and a seamless web.

In point of fact, the continuum and organic connection between public and corporate man-

agement can forge a creative and supportive interplay whose worth, quality and direction may facilitate development, autonomy and modernity by reversing underdevelopment, dependence and backwardness. Empirically speaking, as and when the public sector is, or is seen, as a laggard, the private sector suffers a grievous limitation. Reversely, if the private sector is not adequately a carrier of innovation and entrepreneurship, remains obsessed with profit maximisation and capital accumulation and fails

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to demonstrate developmental partnership and social accountability, the public sector may not be seen as incentivating the overall environment.

Many observers tend to reduce management to control and containment, although control, coordination and monitoring are an integral part of the management function. Nor is management static. It is a dynamic entity like other social and natural sciences and incorporates changes and paradigms as it temporally moves along. Some clearly miss management's analytical, developmental, innovative, experimental, entrepreneurial,

evaluative and forecasting functions.

Another red herring is that management is red-tape-focused, routine, paperwork-centric, and non-cerebral. Far from it. A complex, interdependent and holistic discipline with a vast network of specialties and functionalisations, red-tape and routine -- even if maddening and costly -- are parts of the whole process, and not the entire entity itself. Besides, red-tape has been simplified, streamlined, computerised and customised in many

countries, and does not have to be a permanent condition in any given country's public domain.

But the rub here is that in the management in many developing countries, red-tape is annoyingly pervasive and puts prompt output generation and delivery to ridicule. That is where the bind lies, and any kind of downplaying or rationalisation of red-tape will not simply go well with the customer population. Unpleasant encounters with red-tape, costs, delay, runarounds, humiliations, rudeness and lies are caused by management and operational inadequacies. Management, in the process, gets jived and jig-

gered.

Many seem to conclude, erroneously, that management is about regulation. Popular perception is rife that management is a tool of repression and coercion. It is certainly accurate in some countries/cultures. But this position was more valid when state and social formations were at the initial stage than they are at this time when the socioeconomic space is dotted by group and development programmes, urbanisation, output generation and delivery, life quality pursuits and innovative challenges. One needs to appreciate that -- while regulation often has a negative face and is far too often misused and abused in numerous countries -- regulation, once again, is a part of management, or else organisational pathologies, virulent corruption, violations and negativities cannot be contained.

Far too often, politicisation, partisanisation, power and corruption, intrigue and rivalry, machination and skulduggery, dysfunction and hegemonism are often associated with public sector management. The hard fact is that this is understandable. The hard fact is that management mirrors life and attempts to deal with human, social, behavioural, organisational and cultural life management. The harder fact is that life is not only glitter but also grime, and management gets shoved, pushed and dragged into the party.

Besides these phenomena there is the essentialist conception of management, which posits that it is an intrinsically meaningful study,

value-adding and enlightening. Hardly unique to management and other social sciences, from time immemorial ruling classes, among other things, have been using part of management as self-seeking and power-preserving tools. Human history is littered with such use and abuse of knowledge, skills, talents, and expertise. Yet, the theoretical, empirical, intellectual, applicability and measurement aspects of management are distinctive and science-focused, despite the interest groups' continuous onslaughts and manipulative usurpations.

A harmful aspect in Bangladesh, reeling under traditionalism, conservatism and complacency is the continued de-emphasis on performance measurement and accountability. Numerous excuses are advanced to defend the prevailing performance-indifferent operating culture. As a result, non-performance or poor and costly performance, deception, patronage and spoils system succeed in pushing out achievement, performance, and merit. Moreover, process simplification, updating and accessing are not in place. The upshot of this lapse is undesirable, e.g. organisational purpose continues to be subordinated to tendentious and selective use of management techniques, elite-led manipulation multiplies, the structural exclusion of people remains uninterrupted, and the masses get repeatedly victimised by the use of a virulent variant of zero-sum game.

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## CNG price escalation

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

IT is just in 2008 that we saw doubling of the price of compressed natural gas (CNG). Now we see another price escalation of 50%. Price hike of 2008 was done by a caretaker government in an arbitrary fashion, caring a little about the suffering of the people. This time, such a decision to escalate the price of CNG causing sufferance of common people by a democratic government is to some extent surprising.

The price hike of CNG by the CTG affected the people much less than now because of less traffic jam. We have one of the worst transport systems in our metropolis. The implementation of various plans to ease the traffic jam may take sometime. Thus, paying extra fare due to price hike of CNG may not be a pleasant experience for the common people who are already under pressure from high price essential commodities.

The government has come up with three reasons for this unusual price hike. They are (a) bringing uniformity in the prices of other fuels like octane, kerosene, furnace oil and petrol, (b) financing development of gas sector, and (c) cutting back on subsidies. With regard to (a) we see no urgent necessity to bring uniformity because the prices of other fuels touch mainly the middle and the upper classes. The other factors (b) and (c) are acceptable because we need quick development of our gas fields and gas based industries. In fact, gas crisis is now the main hurdle to investment in industries.

We want less of bureaucratization in our administration and more of democratisation. The government is committed to offer us good governance. With the present system of the administration our dream may never be realised. Without administrative reform we cannot achieve democratic administration necessary for good governance.

At present there is a tendency for bureaucratization (recent deci-



ANDADUL HUQ/DRINKNEWS

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sion to allow bureaucracy to play more important role in the local administration). This reminds me of an observation by German philosopher Prof. Hannah Arendt: "The greater the bureaucratization of public life, the greater will be the attraction to violence. In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom pressure of power can be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom."

No doubt the government is under pressure from transport workers and owners on the one side and the common people on the other. The public in general consider that the decision to raise the fare of auto rickshaw and mini bus has gone in favour of bus owners. They feel that due to collection of raised fare by the bus and mini bus owners, the image of the government has been damaged.

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concerned the city's transport system has remained in disarray. The latest price hike of CNG without consultation with the ministry of communication indicates the negligence of government in improving public transport.

It is true that any government will have to increase the rate of service charge and the price of products for its development. What is objectionable in price hike of CNG is the inefficient handling of a sensitive issue. The decision has failed to satisfy either the public or the bus owners. It has exposed the high influence of concerned bureaucrats who cannot read the pulse of the public correctly. In a highly sensitive issue like determining the price of CNG season leading politicians could have been involved because it is the politicians who are capable of handling sensitive issues effectively.

It is not difficult to conclude that the decision about price hike of CNG deserves revision to cover the interest of both the public and the bus owners. Any police action against bus owners would not only be counter-productive but also damaging.

The writer is a former Joint Secretary.

## Supporting pavement dwellers

Z.A.M. KHAIRUZZAMAN

MAMTAZ, 35, is a floating pavement dweller in the capital city. She, along with her child, stays at Kamalapur railway station. Both of them face a very tough situation here. They live like small boats in very rough waters. Mamtaaz has come here from the rural area to eke out a living in difficult circumstances. But she says she has to suffer police harassment and persecution by local hoodlums. If it rains at night, she has to remain awake as all of her belongings get soaked.

With her little earning from begging, she takes bath at a public toilet for Tk.10 and responds to the call of nature for Tk.5. Here she faces a bleak future. She has no dream of her own. Her only concern is her child, she says while tears roll down her cheeks. She is hopeful that the government will provide a safe shelter for them.

Nasrin, 32, is another street woman in Gulistan area. Previously, she was a sex worker. Incidentally, she got acquainted with a lady whom she calls 'apa,' who took her to a centre run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO). She enlisted Nasrin as a member. Nasrin is now undergoing a sewing training course. "I cherish a dream that one day I shall have a job after my training. Then I may be able to hire a little room to live in," she hoped.

There has been an alarming rise in the number of street people in the major cities of Bangladesh. According to a study conducted by Brac Research and Evaluation Division in March, 2011, 86% vagrants said that lack of night shelters was their major problem. Forty-six percent of them said they were unable to buy food while 40% said they had no guarantee of job. On average, male vagrants have been living on the streets for six years and females for nine years. The vagrants are between 19 to 40 years old. A large number of them are women, of whom 30% are either widowed or divorcees while 19% have been abandoned by their husbands.

Thirty-six percent on pavement vagrants spend nights on footpaths, 14% in rail stations and 13% in stadiums.

Concern Worldwide Bangladesh also conducted a survey on street

people, which showed that every night, around 15,000 to 20,000 people -- both adults and children -- make the streets of Dhaka their home. While replying to queries of the study conducted in May, 2009, 58% said, they lived on the streets for over 10 years. Forty-three percent said they had stayed at the same place for over a decade. Some others said they had become street vagrants just after their birth.

Natural calamity (46%), poverty (22%) and lack of job opportunities (19%) are the main reasons of mass exodus from rural areas to the city, the study said.

Vagrants have no access to basic services like education and health care and live in miserable conditions. They remain the most vulnerable group and a serious obstacle to the

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country's development. Public opinion shows that there is a negative stigma attached to homelessness. We need to raise awareness about the severity of this problem. Floating people collect water from hotels, mosques, lakes and other sources. No public toilets are available where pavement dwellers are based. Women are the worst sufferers.

Rahela, 45, who stays near Panthakunjo Park in Karwan Bazar area, said that absence of toilets is their main problem. Her appeal to the government is for resolving this issue.

Street children are exposed to all sorts of dangers -- from pimps to people involved in criminal activities. They live in a state of neglect, deprived of affection, care and guidance that usually come from near

and dear ones.

Concern Worldwide has launched a five-year project in March 2008 titled, "Amrao Manush" for rehabilitation of 10,000 vagrants. The project is focused on empowering pavement dwellers to create real and lasting change for them as well as their families.

Sajeda Foundation, Social and Economic Enhancement Programme (SEEP), Nari Maitree and Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP) are jointly working for implementation of the project in collaboration with Dhaka City Corporation.

This project offers thousands of people access to their most basic needs. Established in locations where large numbers of pavement dwellers are based, the centres provide a safe place where they can have access to healthcare, start a savings account, keep their possessions in their own lockers and learn skills to build a better future for themselves.

The project has already had a positive impact on pavement dwellers, "Amrao Manush" project coordinator Subash Gomez said. Many NGOs work with street children but this is the first project that works with pavement dwellers. Some of these people have undergone technical and vocational training and are now doing good jobs, he said. There are several successful case studies which encourage other pavement dwellers to return to normal and healthy life.

Dhaka City Corporation can play a major role by undertaking pragmatic programmes for changing the fate of these hapless people, executive director of Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), a networking organisation of non-governmental organisations working for poverty alleviation in urban areas, Khondker Rebeka Sun-Yat said. The City Corporation can utilise its unused buildings by turning those as safe night shelters for working mothers, children and elderly people, Sun-Yat said. NGOs are ready to cooperate with the government. Wealthy people may also extend their hands of cooperation in a bid to turn these floating people into national assets.

It is not possible on the part of the government alone to implement Vision-2021 without the help and cooperation of non-governmental and private organisations or individuals.

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