

# Administrative Capacity

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## Abstract

*Building robust administrative capacity is important in the delivery of services to constituents. However, administrative capacity requires political will and vision, as well as shared goals and measurable metrics that optimize performance. It also requires an activist role in investment and training and industrial and trade policies. The balanced scorecard is a mechanism that could be used to facilitate citizens and government goal setting and to assess accountability and performance.*

**Keywords:** *Administrative Capacity, Globalization, Goals, Performance, Training*

## Introduction

Professor Farazmand's (2009) article, "Building Administrative Capacity for the Age of Rapid Globalization: A Model Prescription for the Twenty-First Century," questions the administrative capacity of governance and public administration. He believes that traditional administrative capacities are not good enough to meet the challenges ahead and that there is a need to retool public governance and administration to develop new sets of knowledge, skills, cultures, and designs that are nonlinear and surprise-management-oriented in organization and management.

Administrative capacity is broadly used in many contexts (Misener and Doherty, 2009). It entails running the machinery of political or economic systems and translating political and collective will into actions through management and implementation (Farazmand, 2009). It is also an aggregation of individual capacities of civil servants since it is their capacities that ultimately determine service delivery (Mentz, 1997; North, 1992). Capacity is the ability to perform functions, solve problems, set goals, and achieve objectives (Milio, 2007; Fukuda-Parr et al., 2002; Janicke, 2001). Thus, it is a set of attributes embodied within efficient organizations that provide the means to effectively accomplish their missions (Misener and Doherty, 2009).

Capacity or organizational capital is an intangible asset, and there is no consensus definition of how to measure it (Black and Lynch, 2004). Administrative capacity appears to vary within the specified activities to be performed. Honadle (1981) believes that it is unlikely that a consensus definition of administrative capacity within the public administration arena will ever be reached.

The capacity to set measurable goals and deliver outcomes is important in all institutions. It is critical in government, educational institutions, corporations, hospitals, even in homes and churches. Thus, improving the capacity of personnel within institutions is essential for

developed and developing societies. A growing body of literature suggests that improvement in productive capacity is contingent on the structure of the organization (Black and Lynch, 2004). The structure is the design (processes) that administers the organization (Chandler, 1962). According to Chandler, structure follows strategy. Therefore, to improve administrative capacity, public administrators need to develop effective strategies.

At the macro level, public administrative capacity is the ability to increase the welfare of the governed, the citizens, by providing appropriate services, facilitating job creation, schooling, healthcare, and so on. It is the maximum sustainable level of public output when public administrative resources are fully utilized, given taste and technology (Winston, 1977). At the micro-level, it is the ability of public servants to deliver maximum public output (services) at minimum cost, given the mission, vision, and strategy of the organization.

Farazmand (2009) argues that governments must constantly upgrade their administrative capacities to meet the challenges of rapid globalization. He notes that these challenges are characterized by hyper-competition, hyper-complexity, and hyper-uncertainty. Nonetheless, he does not succinctly define administrative capacity and his policy prescriptions are not specific. Perhaps because his article does not identify a specific problem, rather it assumes that globalization causes administrative capacity challenges. However, it is not globalization that causes administrative capacity challenges (Bowormwathana, 2009; Cheung, 2009). Rather, it is inappropriate human capacity within governments and institutions that inhibit efficient anticipatory responses to challenges that cause administrative problems.

The Katrina fiasco was not a result of globalization; it was a natural disaster without a capable government anticipatory (preventive) response process. The inappropriate anticipatory response is not unique to public administration. The automobile industry in the United States failed to anticipate consumers' tastes and to take advantage of fuel-efficient technologies. Likewise, management of the money supply, M1, by the Federal Reserve (Fed) before the recession of 2008 also demonstrated a lack of anticipatory response to known predicted consequences of slow monetary growth, a recession. M1 is currency, traveler's checks, demand deposits, and other checkable deposits that consumers use to purchase goods and services.

Failure to govern emanates from a more complex internal and external environment of governance that exposes the limitations of state capacity (Cheung, 2009). Globalization heightens the existing limitations of public administration and management in general, but it is not the cause of the limitations.

### **Consequences of Change**

The argument that "While big changes produce long-term consequences that are beyond immediate anticipation, small changes are more frequent, with predictable and unpredictable consequences" (Farazmand, 2009, p.2008) is disputable. A more coherent

argument is that inappropriate human capacity leads to unpredictable consequences and poor anticipatory responses; it prevents appropriate adjustments to surprise changes. Inappropriate human capacity within organizations is a personnel allocation problem. The allocation of personnel in public administration is seldom optimal, which prevents public institutions from continuously improving performance.

Appropriately allocated human capacity in public administration would be capable of predicting potential failures and developing optimal responses for each potential failure mode. For instance, many industries dealing with unstable processes, implement fail-safe responses based on each likely mode of failure. They use known integrated logistical support (ILS) techniques to ensure the supportability of assets and services during the design, development, and life cycle of a project or process. ILS involves techniques such as reliability-centered maintenance (RCM), failure modes and effects analysis (FMEA), process documentation, and so on, which are suitable for implementing anticipatory responses to potential occurrences of undesirable events. Additionally, these industries implement preventive maintenance (PM) techniques to improve reliability and longevity of assets, robust internal and external processes to ensure consistency and repeatability, and surveys to gauge consumers' level of satisfaction and expectations.

Policy capacity, therefore, involves philosophical choices and principles, as well as the ability to translate policy into reality (Tsao, 2009). Philosophical choices can lead to the establishment of robust and enforceable efficient surprise-management procedures or, as in the case of New Orleans levies (Katrina), to years of maintenance and upgrading neglect.

Farazmand (2009) suggestion of revitalizing public administration, although useful, is a tall order. How is this done (Bowornwathana, 2009)? According to Farazmand, this can be done externally through the legislative process, engaging citizens, community organizations, and other organizational institutions in governance and administration, along with building trust among a broad-based citizenry and enhancing transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior.

External influences are unlikely to affect the internal capacity of the government or any other institution. The structure and coordination of internal planning processes determine whether the capacity potential is realized in organizations (Boschken, 1988). The revitalization of government must occur from within; it requires competent public administrators and politicians who understand the needs (demands) of constituents and are capable of translating visions and policies into reality. Additionally, it requires internal mechanisms to set clearly defined, actionable, and measurable goals to meet the needs of constituents (Gable and Davis, 2004) in a timely fashion and at minimum cost. Thus, political platforms should be akin to a balanced scorecard (BSC). Moreover, the scorecard goals must cascade from the organization's mission to administrators and individual public employee's performance. The goals should be used to measure how effectively citizens' needs and the overarching vision are met.

The problem, however, is matching the right individual capacity for the right job. Even if there is an overabundance of human capacity in the public administration field, given the

current job allocation process, it is unlikely that the right resources would be allocated to the right jobs. The general political tendency is to allocate resources based on relationships or from within tight-knit agencies. Allocations based on relationships are often sub-optimal, and too much allocation from within (inbreeding) limits interaction with the outside world and inhibits innovation (Widener, 2005). Organizations, like organisms, to survive and prosper must be open to and achieve the appropriate relationships with the environment (Morgan, 1997). Like high yield fields, governments and institutions require external fertilizers, outsiders with different views and experiences to improve organizational capacity.

It is difficult, however, for most hiring managers to know ex-ante, without extensive research, the capacity and motivation of outsiders. Thus, most hiring managers (politicians), including voters, reduce their search cost and risk by hiring (voting for) individuals with similar traits as the existing cadre of employees and self. Furthermore, human capacity is often not the deciding factor in public job allocation. In many instances, factors such as political affiliation, race, friendship, looks, residency requirements, and so on influence the selection process, to the detriment of capacity.

Governance and public administration enshrined in the English-speaking literature are inherently deficient in social and cultural specificity as well as sensitivity (Cheung, 2009). As a result, the hiring process has been prone to selection bias. Selection bias prevents the efficient organization of governments and institutions.

### **Employment and Capacity Selection**

The basis of employment in highly competitive and transparent fields, such as professional sports where they keep detailed statistics on each performer, is often on capacity or meritocracy. In other fields, they seldom keep detailed statistics on employees' performance. As a result, it is difficult to assess employees' true performance and contribution to organizational capacity. Thus, often, employment is not based on capacity or meritocracy. In many instances, employment is a mechanism for allocating income to preferred citizens. However, it is the employment allocation process that determines the quantity and quality of each product and service produced, as well as the techniques used to produce outputs (Layard and Walters, 1978). Therefore, when the employment allocation is inefficient, devoid of capacity (competency), output, and quality, as well as anticipatory responses, will not be adequate.

When governments use public jobs for partisan distribution of income, the marginal product (added output) of labor is often less than wages paid to labor. Consequently, the quantity and quality of services rendered will not be optimum since the cost of production would exceed the price of output. Inferior services, over time, degrade the public system and the economic system that it supports.

In an ideally organized economy, we cannot treat the issue of allocation of jobs and distribution of products and services separately (Layard and Walters, 1978). For instance, it is income from job allocation (employment) that allows the distribution of products and

services among employed citizens. The employment of resources with comparative advantages optimizes output and provides competitive capacity. If employment is sub-optimal, the output would not be optimized. Under globalization, nations and corporations that failed to optimize output would not be able to capitalize on regional or global trade. Therefore, they incur trade deficits with regional and global trading partners. Large trade deficits adversely affect gross domestic product (income), and hence production and employment. It is, therefore, paramount in a global economy to optimize employee allocation (comparative advantage) among products and services.

It is also important to understand the relationship between state and society, state and market, and politics and administration, and these relationships should not be treated separately (Cheung, 2009).

Governments' economic problem, therefore, is how best to allocate the most competent citizens among public jobs to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens. In democratic economies, the optimization of public administration jobs often conflicts with adversarial political ideologies. Thus, governments do not allocate the most capable citizens to the right public jobs. Often, the motivating factor for allocating public jobs is the advocacy of party-line positions on issues and not competency. Thus, political self-interest concerns are at the core of public job allocations.

The adversarial political system often subjects the voting public to perceptual distortions, assimilation, and contrast effects (O'Keefe, 1990), as well as attributions. O'Keefe notes that by increasing discrepancies, more favorable attitudes will occur for contrary points of view. Given imperfect information, recognizing and filtering out distortion and misinformation is difficult.

The fundamental problem for constituents (voters) is how to motivate public servants to act in the best interest of citizens; it is a basic principal-agent problem (Stiglitz, 1991). Stiglitz argues that because there is imperfect information, public servants (agents) seldom maximize citizens' (owners) values. Imperfect information gives public servants the discretion to pursue their interests and to infuse the environment with distortions. A typical example is the invasion of Iraq, the healthcare debate, and distributional issues.

Without political will, determination and accountability, governments cannot effectively deliver education, food, water, infrastructure, healthcare, housing, and other essential services or provide for the protection of basic rights (Tsao, 2009). Likewise, we cannot maximize equality without a powerful state intervention that limits individual liberty, and individual liberty cannot be expanded indefinitely without a pernicious form of social inequality (Fukuyama, 2006).

A publicly sponsored non-partisan institute that analyzes political distortions and provides the public with an undistorted view of issues could mitigate partisan distortions and contribute to governance optimization. Moreover, the non-partisan institute could help develop well-defined and measurable ethical and socio-economic goals for steering economic and educational advancement.

In the age of globalization, neo-liberal laissez faire economics does not appear to optimize economies. The successes of East Asian countries substantiate that the policies of developmental states with strong and centralized interventionist institutional structures can generate and sustain high growth rates (The World Bank, 1997; Cheung, 2009). The notion that governments should not intervene in economies appears to have adversely affected economic growth in the United States. The East Asian governments' activist role in investment, training and industrial and trade policy facilitated their economic development (Wing-Hung Lo, Man-Keung Lo, and Cheung, 2001). The East Asian successes have also led to the importation of deflation into the United States. Deflation has caused downward pressure on global prices (Kamin, Marazzi, and Schindler, 2004) and led to the relocation, or dismantling, of non-competitive local factories and wage stagnation in the U.S.

### **The Concept of a Developmental State**

The concept of a developmental state challenges the neo-liberal view of the rapid economic growth of the Four Little Tigers: Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea (Howell, 2006). In contrast to the view that governments are impediments to economic development, developmental states place a premium on cultivating state capacity (Wing-Hung Lo et al., 2001). Professor Howell indicates, "The ideal-typical developmental state has a political and policy elite committed to economic growth and transformation, with the power, authority, and legitimacy to promote developmental agenda" (p. 275). Moreover, the elite is competent, in the economic sphere, with the technical and managerial capacity to guide development, and, with a few exceptions, developmental states tend to have weak civil societies, poor civil and political rights, and repressive political regimes (Howell). Their structure is like corporations operating in democratic societies.

Developmental states demonstrate the capacity to combine economic growth with a good dose of redistribution (Howell, 2006). Howell, however, does not believe that China strictly fits the definition of a developmental state. Nonetheless, the Chinese experience in developing capacity is interesting. Although China is a socialist country, under Deng Xiaoping, it adopted a piecemeal pragmatic approach to development; moreover, China does not hesitate to adopt capitalist processes if they help resolve problems (Tsao, 2009). Tsao notes that in 2003 when Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao took the reins of China, they put people first and shifted emphasis from economic growth to social and welfare policies. The approach stressed continuous development and a service-oriented government.

Western democracies are less inclined to adopt non-Western processes even when helpful in solving intractable problems. Rather, they continue to preach market-oriented policies. However, during their development, the consensus preached was not what they followed (Ha-Joon, 2002). Thus, their policy advice is often not experience-based knowledge or a result of legitimate successful experience (Tankha, 2009).

It is difficult to build efficient administrative capacity in democratic countries due to adversarial political philosophies, favoritism, the role of corporatism and unions, institutional inbreeding, and the stickiness of employee redeployment. The current

healthcare reform in the United States reflects the ingrained adversarial governance philosophies, which often do not serve the public well. Furthermore, politics drive most public decisions in democratic countries. Thus, the basis of public decisions is seldom maximization of community welfare and minimization of cost. Rather, politicians base many decisions on maximizing political gains at any cost.

Many provinces in China promote economic development and services that benefit their citizens. During the early 1980s, China created special zones in Guangdong and Fujian provinces to encourage domestic and foreign business investment through tax incentives and other measures (Tsao, 2009). Tsao notes that the reforms were small, isolated, incremental, and embodied with institutional changes. The basic idea was to take a fresh look at problems and challenges and offer new solutions and approaches that were not path-dependent. As a result, China has enjoyed staggering growth rates, averaging around 8 percent and a rising living standard (Howell, 2006).

It is important to understand the strategies and processes that developmental states use to grow their economies. These strategies and processes could be applicable, with appropriate human capacity, to local governments in democratic countries. The East Asian model could promote economic development and facilitate jobs for local citizens. For instance, regional governments in democratic societies could deliberately diversify their economies using tax and other incentives to attract new businesses, establish and nurture educational institutions, including colleges and universities. Despite the contrarian conservative view, governments have always played a leading role in the economy (Farazmand, 2005; Fukuyama, 2006).

But, how would citizens measure the performance of governments? And, would performance or party affiliation become the critical factor? In places such as Philadelphia, Baltimore, and other regions, including at the national level, party affiliation is stronger than administrative performance. Nonetheless, the East Asian economies offer some clues, such as the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which steered economic and social development in Japan (Howell, 2006). The MITI, established in 1949, was one of the most powerful agencies in the Japanese government. Its mission was to coordinate trade policy. MITI was also responsible for domestic industries and businesses. Therefore, establishing regional non-partisan institutes in the United States could, like MITI in Japan, help steer regional economic and social development.

### **Balanced Scorecard**

Good performance reflects organizational success, which depends on strategies (Sharma, 2009). Strategic planning positively affects performance (Gibbons and O'Connor, 2005). However, there are different views on strategy formation: the rational approach (Andrews, 1987) identifies goals and objectives and selects optimal strategies (Gibbons and O'Connor). Others argue that strategy formation is fragmented, evolutionary, intuitive, and evolving (Quinn, 1978); strategy is a pattern in a stream of decisions (Mintzberg, 1978). The balanced scorecard (BSC) developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992) is suitable for

strategy development, performance measurement, and goal accountability (Niven, 2003; Lang, 2004).

The BSC guards against organizational sub-optimization, it forces simultaneous accounts of all-important operational measures (Letza, 1996). Letza notes that organizational strategy and vision are at the core of the BSC. Figure 1 depicts how the BSC links the organization's mission and vision to measurable strategy (goals) associated with the four BSC perspectives (Sharma, 2009). The four perspectives are innovation and learning, customer, internal business, and financial. The BSC allows managers to examine the organization from the four perspectives simultaneously.

The following is a brief description of the four perspectives:

*Innovation and Learning Perspective:* Constitute the essential foundation for the success of any knowledge-worker organization (Sharma, 2009). It enables the other three perspectives (Niven, 2003). Learning, however, is more than training; it includes organizational mentors and tutors as well as communication mechanisms and technological tools that facilitate problem-solving. It is the capacity of the organization (Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Kiel, 2006). Niven notes, "this perspective cannot be overlooked in the development process" (p. 19).

*Customer Perspective:* Addresses the customers' view of the organization; how well the organization is serving its constituency. The organization must know who its customers are and what the value proposition in serving them is (Niven, 2003).

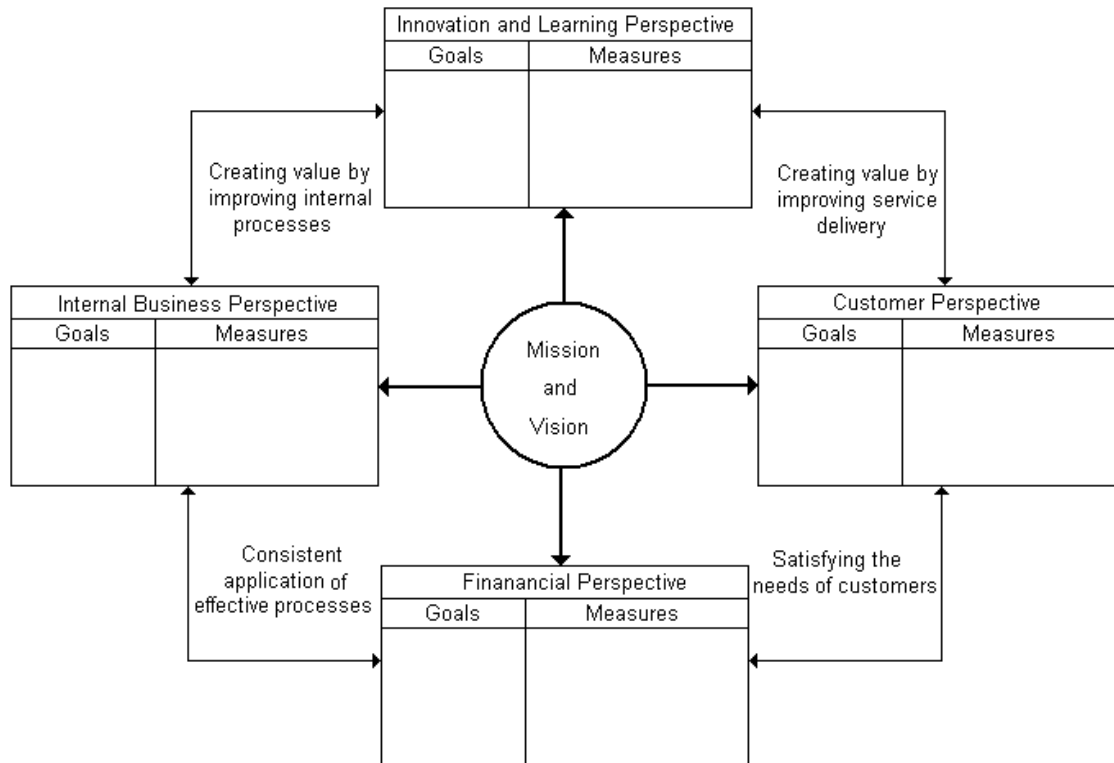
*Internal Processes Perspective:* Addresses the critical processes for satisfying customers and shareholders. These are the processes that the organization must concentrate its efforts to excel. To satisfy customers, organizations may need to develop new internal processes, rather than continuous improvement of existing processes (Niven, 2003).

*Financial Perspective:* addresses shareholders' (constituents') view of the organization and desirable financial goals. It confirms if the strategy execution results in improved bottom-line results (Niven, 2003).

## **Government Organizations**

Government organizations (GO), unlike for-profit organizations, are characterized by the absence of identifiable owners (Dodor, Gupta, and Daniels, 2009) and are generally not considered models of good business management (Lang, 2004). Public administration continues to struggle with issues of accountability (Holmes et al., 2006). Holmes et al. believe that BSC is a potential mechanism for building administrative capacity and government accountability in developing countries. However, it is also applicable to public administration in developed countries.





**Figure 1 - Perspectives of the Balanced Scorecard**

Within democracies, constituents empower politicians. Thus, GO constituents are customers as well as unidentifiable owners. If constituents (customers) of GO are not satisfied, they will eventually find other politicians or political parties to meet their needs (Sharma, 2009). Nonetheless, there is no mechanism for constituents to develop goals and metrics for GO, politicians, or public administrators. If such a mechanism existed, constituents could motivate public servants to act in their best interest.

A competent non-partisan public sponsored group committed to economic growth and transformation could be the mechanism whereby constituents could develop shared goals that might facilitate the revitalization of public administration. The non-partisan group would examine the needs of individuals and regions, recommend appropriate solutions, and monitor the progress of the shared public goals on behalf of citizens. The independent non-partisan group could use an approach like the BSC.

**Conclusion**

It is essential to revitalize and improve public administrative capacity at all levels. However, given the adversarial political system in certain societies, public servants seldom act in the best interest of constituents, particularly due to the principal-agent problem. Strategies from developmental countries could mitigate the principal-agent problem by establishing a competent non-partisan public group committed to steering economic growth and social development. The non-partisan group would document citizen shared concerns (goals) in a BSC format. Local governments (politicians) could use the BSC as a

strategic management tool to help optimize operations. BSC facilitates performance measurements as well as strategy development for achieving long-term goals. Developing the BSC with constituent participation would enhance government services and shared responsibilities.

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