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Development Planning

Thoughts on Professional Counselling

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The German Foundation for Developing Countries held an international conference on problems of regional planning within the framework of integrated projects at Berlin-Tegel in November of 1967. The conference was attended by members of a relatively young profession, that of a development planner. Although there is already a vast amount of literature available on his field of work, mainly in the USA, we know as yet very little about the professional development planner himself, his status and his communication problems.

The German "Planning Family"

In the Federal Republic of Germany the year 1967 was marked by the establishment of a number of planning staffs. At top level an advisory group was set up for the Federal Chancellor. At ministerial level the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Ministry of Economics, and the Federal Ministry of Labour were all equipped with planning staffs. At ministerial level this trend was also evident in many of the Federal Lands.

The planning group of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation can now look back on more than one and a half year of intensive activity. The Ministry itself is of recent date, and therefore this planning group is no doubt less beset with problems than the planning staff of the old-established Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs is, where both isolation and strong bureaucratic resistance must first be overcome. The planning machinery of the Federal Ministry of Defence is perhaps the most modern of all. The staff has been able to draw from recent experiences at international level and to make use of operational research and a large data bank in approaching long-, medium- and short-term planning.

The German "planning family" came together for the first time at a conference dealing with the role of the professional adviser in public affairs, held at the Loccum Protestant Academy. At this conference Winfried Böll raised the question whether these new advisory groups were not perhaps symptomatic for a sick bureaucracy.

Does a minister really need a planning staff? Are not the heads of departments and sub-departments the suitable staff from which he should receive advice and with which he should develop planning conceptions in joint deliberation? Is it not one of the main tasks of a head of a department in a ministry to bring forward ideas and to advise the minister on basic questions of policy falling within the competency of his department? In fact, is not planning the very proper domain of such leading officials? Is not the new instrument, the planning staff, simply a consequence of the failure in the Federal Republic of Germany to carry through a very necessary administrative reform? The leading officials are so burdened with routine tasks that they have no time to concern themselves with important questions of basic policy. This dilemma is also plaguing the large private organisations which, rather than doing their own thinking, are simply following the example of the state and establishing planning staffs of their own. Quite naturally the unconscious desire for prestige also comes into play.

Antiquated Cabinet System

Without doubt there are matters arising in day-to-day work which might have ramifications beyond the sphere of competency of a single department; general reports must be delivered, problems of coordination must be settled, and so on. The establishment of a general planning section therefore seems quite logical. However, the main argument in support of such an arrangement, which purports that other leading staff members are thereby relieved of certain tasks and have more time for thought and study, is a very dangerous one. Degradation to pure officialism is the result. We again have a cabinet system typical of the principalities of the past but no longer practicable in this modern age of management characterised by the delegation of responsibility and an open line of communications from top to bottom and vice versa. Therefore, ministers and executive directors should make wise use of their general planning sections, to be understood above all as "information accelerators" and "information collectors" in the sphere of planning and target setting. At the same time they should avoid the dangers inherent in a situation in which power is concentrated in the hands of a single staff unit.

This question regarding decision making in German administration is of particular importance to development policy especially because of the role which we have assumed as teachers of the Third World in the field of planning. We second advisers to planning boards and hold seminars on planning problems, but whether we ourselves are on the right track with our institutional solution to the problems of planning and decision making is a question which has not yet entered our minds.

No Long-term Planning Conception

Reading a basic statement released to the press by one of our ministers, we are not seldom surprised to find out that behind this statement there is no long-term planning conception; on the contrary, we sense the quick decision of an able statesman who has a flair for politics. He may have been more influenced by a conversation which he had the evening before with colleagues or friends than by the recommendations of his leading staff. Perhaps he is new in office and has not yet full confidence in his apparatus. He may have learned by experience that in important decisions all possible alternatives are not always clearly presented to him or that to a certain degree the advice of his "advisers" has been dictated by a desire for personal gain or greater power rather than by unbiassed judgement. Perhaps as a very engaged politician he has an instinctive aversion towards planners in the role of advisers in the knowledge that they tend to provide him with hypotheses of future developments whereas his world is the present one of daily decisions. And in this world the reading of press comments in the morning papers is more important than the study of lengthy reports on planning with their highly technical terminology.

The planners and theorists among us do not realise how down to earth, how practical, how human the approach to decision making is at top political level. But is it therefore necessarily less designed towards an objective?

In reporting his experiences as adviser to President Kennedy, Henry Kissinger maintains that politics is in essence the shaping of the future and that therefore a high degree of creative fantasy schooled by the intellect must distinguish the capable statesman. If this is right, we must draw the logical psychological conclusion that a too great knowledge of details disturbs rather than fosters this creative process.

Morally Determined Decisions

When an expert working in a specific scientific field of study reaches his conclusions on the basis of a thorough knowledge of all relevant research results, he sets a keystone, he does not challenge us to a fresh way of thinking. Such a challenge is rather the fruit of moral motives, standards of values, a concept of a better way of life calling for realisation. The present trend towards planning staffs, scientific advisers and advisory boards, and the growing influence of experts in the political field, are perhaps a sign that an ever greater number of political leaders is not endowed with the inner strength of a moral view of life. In their insecurity, they willingly accept new possibilities of orientation. But can the vast body of knowledge in the modern sciences and the tremendous amount of data stored by computers really help the decision makers to reach truly moral decisions? The young leaders in countries of the Third World seem to have fallen prey to this error and are fascinated by the magic of a large planning apparatus. But no matter how hard the experts try, they cannot derive a sound planning conception from data alone. The final decisions, the mental radar screen on which the priorities of values are pinpointed, base on philosophical and theological considerations and not on empirical sciences and technical know-how.

Those who carry responsibility seldom have the time to dwell in this sphere. Only rarely do they find cause to render account for their moral motives. Indeed, this question is almost tabu. And just for this reason it must be clearly pointed out when planning is the object of consideration.

In my opinion it is possible to draw certain conclusions from lessons learned in the field of planning and to set up a number of guidelines.

Training of Young Politicians

The wise and proper use of the vast fund of complex expert knowledge, organised within or extraneously to the administration, postulates a special type of political leader in the legislative or executive branch. This special type, confronted by the challenge of taking decisions under ever increasing time-pressure, is capable to turn inward drawing instructions from his "moral radar screen," in order to make secure decisions. Strong personalities of this type are rare, as we all know; on the contrary, the sociology of the current-day political party machinery tends to school the politician who thinks in terms of pure tactics and function. Therefore, I am convinced that the planning business can only be successful in the long run if we are ready—and this may sound utopian today—to turn to a system of selection and of specialised training for young politicians. This applies to the developing countries now establishing democratic systems of government just as it does to the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Broadly Trained "Generalist"

The expert who is engaged in planning either as a public official within a ministry or on an outside basis must also be given "target training" and the time to meditate on the selected criteria governing his planning intentions. It is he who must ask the political leaders the right questions in order to avoid confusion, duplication, and contradiction in planning assignments. Obviously in Germany such training cannot be included in regular university studies nor can it form part of the further training of public officials; we only must think of the extensive knowledge a development planner must have in the fields of ethnology, comparative cultures, comparative religions, and social psychology. Not only the politician, but also his adviser must have additional training if planning is to be efficient and effective. In selecting personnel for advisory tasks, preference will probably have to be given to the broadly trained "generalist" with a good knowledge of philosophy over the development-oriented "specialist".

Qualifications of Professional Development Planners

For the purpose of such selection and training, we must know what we require of a professional development planner. I suggest that he ought to have special knowledge and skills as well as experience in the following fields:

- ☐ tactics, strategy and logistics of economic and social development,
- ☐ process analysis,
- ☐ social infrastructure,
- ☐ intercultural communication,
- ☐ public relations.

He must know how to classify priorities, how to obtain relevant information, how to organise team work, and how to set up a system of regular evaluation of his own work. He must know how to determine what opinions prevail and how such opinions can be changed. It need not be emphasised that the methods of training adopted and the type of facilities provided are of decisive importance to the success of the training effort. Furthermore, the teaching staff must be permitted to alternate teaching activities with actual planning work in the administration. In West Germany there are a number of grave obstacles which first must be removed.

New Administrative Professions

Also, a number of specialists are required to fill the role of interpreter in the dialogue between administration and science. They must be thoroughly conversant with the administrative terminology and the highly complex scientific terminology. They must have a special flair for bringing abstracts of long scientific reports in a suitable form for use by the administration. We should also have a greater number of scientific managers with a personal knowledge of current "research market" conditions who can provide the right expert at the right time and the right place of decision in the administrative apparatus. And finally, there is a need for experts familiar with the most modern methods on data-processing who can collect, store and process all data and information required for the planning process. We are speaking here of three new professions, and the public authorities may adopt the practice of delegating the task of training to special institutions. In fact, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation is cooperating in this sense with the German Foundation for Developing Countries and the German Development Institute in the field of documentation and professional counselling, and the Office of the Federal Chancellor is working together with the Institute of Science and Politics in the same manner.

In point of fact, we have no shortage of specialised expert knowledge; rather, we have failed to organise it properly. The politician, even as a non-specialised expert, has command over a great deal of knowledge gained through hard work and experience, and the same may be said for the public official of a ministry with his long practice in administration. Neither need feel inferior to the university professor, whose expert knowledge is simply of a different sort. The experience and skills of all three groups must serve the development process. Precisely in the field of development no group can function without the advice and the knowledge of the other. Our task is to find a common language and develop methods of cooperation which will enable us to overcome the psychological barrier between "autonomous scientists", "bearers of authority," and "independent deputies". In our day-to-day work we are already all dependent on one another and only in joint effort can we do our tasks properly.