

CAPABILITY IN GOVERNMENT IN INDIA: POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract

This paper examines capabilities in government in India. Possibilities for improvement have implications for all levels of government. The intention of many proposals is twofold: to help citizens get what they need from officialdom and to enable different levels of governments to relate more effectively to diverse communities and to each other. The paper explores four topics: ways of thinking about capability in government; how strategies for politics can overshadow directions in government; how improving the management of relations between different levels of government can benefit all; and how opportunities for improving civil service capabilities, at the central, state, and local levels need political as well as internal leadership.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines capabilities in government in India. Recent exploration of possibilities for improvement includes a wide range of policy and operational fields. It has implications for all levels of government. The intention of many proposals is twofold: to help citizens get what they need from officialdom and to enable different levels of governments to relate more effectively to diverse communities and to each other. Initiatives in economic management are proposed to generate more countrywide opportunities for employment . Improvements in design and delivery of health and education programs are promoted to enable citizens to develop their own capabilities. Improvements in relationships between levels of government are promoted so that community voices can be heard, and responses coordinated. As the Centre for Policy Research

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states in relation to its State Capacity Initiative, it should be a priority ‘to place the critical challenges of building state capacity at the heart of the field of policy research in India, where it has always belonged but remains surprisingly marginalised’ (Centre for Policy Research).

The paper explores four topics: ways of thinking about capability in government; how strategies for politics can overshadow directions in government; how improving the management of relations between different levels of government can benefit all; and how opportunities for improving civil service capabilities at the central, state, and local levels need political as well as internal leadership.

Two questions run through each topic. How can citizens make their voices heard? How can much-needed changes come about?

The answers are elusive and contingent. However, experience of selected past policy turning points may suggest where to look. Extensive popular participation in politics has given citizens experience in how to raise their voices. It has driven major changes in the political landscape. Within government, examples where thinking beyond current practice has been adopted suggest ways of working that may be extended within the public sector.

WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT CAPABILITY

Capability is the ability to do things. It suggests power and energy. The meaning of capacity is similar. In Hindi, the same word (क्षमता *ksamata*) can be used for both. For capacity, the term for power (शक्ति *shakti*) is also used. This paper uses the term capability. However, some relevant references use the term capacity. Whichever term is used, the same question arises: how do power, energy, and ability interact within the institutions and processes of government to produce results that citizens value?

In a recent book on public institutions entitled *Rethinking Public Institutions in India* (Kapur et al 2017: 30) the editors ask: ‘Can India transition to a new equilibrium—a virtuous cycle of an accountable, high-capacity, decentralized, information-based state that is responsive to citizens rather than superiors?’ Although mostly prepared in the last years of the UPA government up until 2014, the book was designed as a catalyst for analysis and action and much remains relevant. Contributors recognised in explicit terms the capability difficulties that public sector institutions face.

The book provides a continuing challenge in two parts. The first is to identify options for building improved capability. Change on the scale

envisaged is difficult; identifying possibilities is sensitive. It involves questions about what governments can do well and whether effective approaches can be spread more widely. However, it can also probe weaknesses in uncomfortable places. The second is to use enhanced capability, as it is still developing, to make further sought-after transitions. In a public sector used to wielding substantial executive authority within slow changing institutions, both challenges set the bar high. Addressing them requires practicable proposals, communities receptive to change and leaders willing to take not only opportunities but also risks. It also requires time.

Practicable proposals start from the context in which governments work. Governments, unitary or federal, face a range of forces, local to global, and social to environmental, which mix and mingle and do battle. In India, a flexible national constitution shares responsibilities between central and state governments. It allows swings between centralisation and decentralisation. However, processes for managing relationships between levels of government are, in comparison with other federal systems, less developed. For ambitious union governments keen to make quick changes, centralisation is attractive. For citizens who prefer to deal with people and institutions close by, decentralisation of more official activities may be preferred.

Often identified generic public sector capabilities include the ability to:

- Propose feasible and legal options to benefit citizens that gain support from the leaders of the government
- Ensure effective coordination between levels of government, including consultation and negotiation where views differ
- Ensure effective coordination between government agencies within levels of government, including consultation and negotiation where views differ
- Ensure effective and wide community consultation, from citizens and families to businesses and corporations
- Manage implementation, achieve objectives and be publicly accountable within available resources.

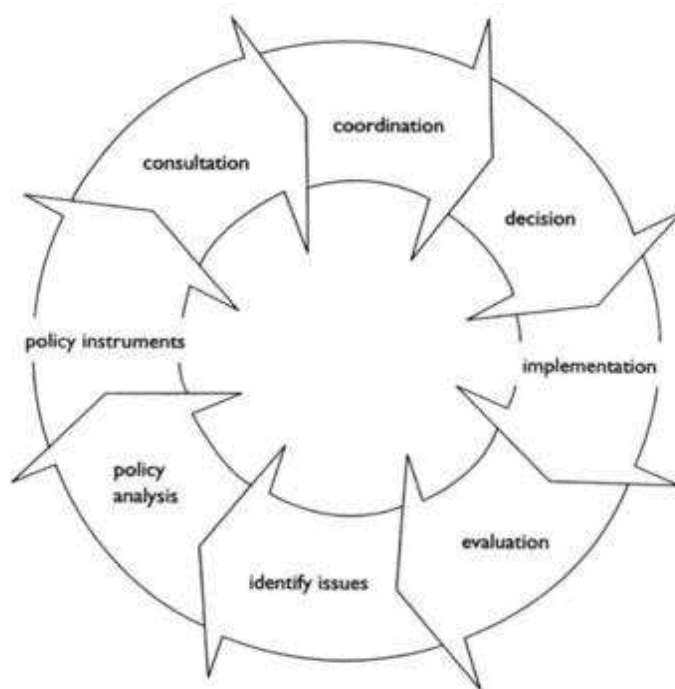
Political requirements and public management resources need to mesh. When current and emerging challenges are spread across boundaries, between and within existing organisations, feasibility and legitimacy depend on consultation and coordination.

Thinking about policy making as a cycle makes plain the number of points at which interaction between political leaders, public sector agencies and community and business organisations can take place. The following

diagram was originally set out in a handbook for public servants in Australia (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis 2013: 38). The cycle begins with the identification of issues and continues through policy analysis, policy instruments, consultation, and coordination. It concludes with decision, implementation, and evaluation.

However, as practitioners and observers know, one turn of the cycle is rarely enough. Similarly, a neat turn with all steps covered never suffices. In complex issues, a linear sequence cannot be expected: a review can be prompted at any stage; steps are interdependent and can be repeated in any sequence. Issues and approaches are contestable throughout, and preferences may change at each step.

A Policy Cycle



Source: De Rango, E: <https://commonslibrary.org/windows-and-cycles-how-policy-gets-made/>

Appropriate analysis on its own is insufficient. Claims about insufficient consultation and coordination can derail otherwise sound analysis. This is especially so if proposals for implementation become problematic and political leaders have second thoughts. For this reason, effective thinking about implementation starts with policy analysis. However, at the outset of a policy project, the available information is often incomplete. Options

depend on estimates of ‘what might work’. A proposed policy becomes a ‘hypothesis’ (Altman, Bridgman and Davis 2013:7). Advocates can expect questions about what a proposal, if adopted, will do. Political leaders are likely to ask: ‘how do you know?’

Capability is a bundle: improvements in one field depend on improvements in others, abilities to analyse and advocate are linked to abilities to listen and collaborate, abilities to respond to political leaders and secure their support are linked to abilities to understand where political leaders want to go. Overall abilities in policy work are linked to abilities to understand and manage operations. Importantly, at every stage, capability must be linked to public accountability.

In these circumstances, transitions as sought by Kapur et al. will not happen without help. Two forces need to join: advocacy of cogent proposals and opportunities to make them such that political leaders find compelling. Advocacy can be prepared but opportunities are rare. Comparing strategies for politics and strategies for government suggests reasons why this is so.

STRATEGIES FOR POLITICS AND STRATEGIES FOR GOVERNANCE

When strategies for government are overshadowed by strategies for politics, governance suffers. Continuous campaigning tends to displace policy thinking. Politics extends deeper and deeper into programs and operations: quick fixes are preferred, public sector agencies lose effectiveness, and public trust in government is diminished. The phenomenon is widespread.

Countries with established democratic institutions and records of effective public management are not immune to this phenomenon, the causes and effects of which are still debated. However, reflections on public sector changes by a former department head in the Australian Public Service (Barratt) provide a glimpse of the perceived decline. That this insight comes from a former insider in a governmental system often recognised as well institutionalised is salutary. Reflections by a former head of the prime minister’s department in Australia (Parkinson) on drift and on climate policies deepen the impact. As political will to tackle climate policy weakened, scientific assessments were side-lined.

In India too, politics and the practice of government interact in an uneasy combination. Forms of government and a constitution adapted from European and North American models by elite leaders and imposed on

local culture and governance practices are under pressure to reflect more explicitly Indian values. Politics predominates.

In the assessment of a close observer, electoral democracy and high levels of electoral participation have led to the 'creolisation' of representative democracy (Yadav 2020:1). Leaders from provincial and rural backgrounds have become more and more prominent. Many communities formerly excluded from public life have found their voices. They tend to express their needs through political action. Communities still excluded strive to follow. Support for candidates and parties is conditional. Electoral appeals span a wide range of community, caste, ideological and personal incentives.

However, pre-election hopes transfer imperfectly to results in government. The wide reach of the government is without impacts to match. In India, governance is often seen as firm direction by strong leadership (Smith 2017). However, wide gaps exist between what electors vote for and what they get. For some leaders and their supporters, political action is simply about winning government.

Governments tend to deliver visible and tangible benefits and goods. Schemes for welfare and palliation for disaffected groups tend to take priority. Seen from above, governments are busy as ministers announce directives, civil servants provide information to ministers and receive instructions, and central directions are given about implementation. From below however, governments are often distant, compartmentalised, and difficult to approach. Approachable officialdom is spread unevenly, as is access to effective intermediaries. However, more and more citizens are willing to demand accessibility in governmental structures.

Political parties tend to be centralised. Party directions are characterised by broad electoral programs, ambitious promises, and tight and often dynastic centres. State leaders of national parties are subject to central nomination and removal. Regional parties too, tend to have dominant leaders. Policy directions come less from focused deliberation and more from adjustments seen as convenient at the time. As ministers make decisions and civil servants apply them, patterns build up. Deliberations on specific proposals tend to come only after consensus building on possible directions over time. Then, options must be negotiated and ministerial preferences determined.

Throughout, political will and how its manner of expression are critical. When deployed in a focused way, executive power is strong but taking big initiatives is risky. In the meantime, leaders want to stay in office. Institutions that frustrate political will face political consequences. Civil

service institutions experience that at close range. However, judicial and regulatory institutions are not exempt. Nor are the institutions of internal and external security. Political will can easily balk at difficult policy problems while seeking to quieten sources of critique.

Two threads run through most political strategies since independence : options for accommodating diversity; and the attractions of centralised direction. The union constitution provides for a strong centre but with tiers of state, territory, and local government across a large population with different languages and cultures. After independence, the ruling Congress Party initially accommodated diversity and centralisation within itself. Following the breakdown of the ‘Congress System’ and the emergence of opposition and regional parties, union governments tended to oscillate between centralisation and coalitions. Assertive state governments run by regional parties combined with extensive periods of coalition governments in Delhi led to expectations that the trend to coalitions would continue. The electoral rise of the BJP and the composition and approach—ideological but consensual—of governments led by Prime Minister Vajpayee to 2004 did not discourage this view.

However, the election in 2014 of the government led by Prime Minister Modi reversed the trend. It also introduced explicitly strong threads of majoritarianism and homogenisation. Accommodating diversity and negotiating coalition governments gave way to centralisation and nationalism grounded in Hindutva. A dominant prime minister attracted strong personal support for his energy and drive. In many quarters, his rise from a non-elite, non-English speaking background deepened support. In 2019, the government won a re-election with an increased majority.

However, questions of capability persist. So do questions about the fruitfulness of centralised political direction. Even with a return to high economic growth, issues of economic management and equitable access to the benefits of growth and employment remain. Experience of high growth years, the rise of a new and aspirational middle class and expectations of continuing growth pose challenges of performance. Increments towards a national mixed economy have yet to establish a regulatory environment which: supports competitive markets accepted as legitimate and is able to generate prosperity in which all may share; stimulates effectiveness in government businesses; enables divestment and privatisation of selected government businesses within a competitive and publicly accepted framework; and gives citizens confidence in their own prospects. The dominance of a public sector directed economy has been breached but preference for government provision of goods and services persists. Aspirations for exports are strong but so are instincts for

protection. Relationships between business and government remain close and often obscure.

The range of issues at stake is wide. Without good information about actual conditions, and careful deliberations with interested communities and interests, difficult issues resist resolution. In these circumstances, the development of improved capabilities may become attractive. Enlisting more effort from the states and local governments may be one approach. Building up the policy and management capability of the civil service, state as well as central, may be another. Improving abilities to listen to citizens who are living in very different circumstances across the country may prove to be critical to all initiatives.

HOW WHAT HAPPENS BEYOND NEW DELHI MATTERS

When New Delhi directs, and state governments do, the states tend to get blamed for poor implementation and the union government for poor policy design. Union governments with strong majorities have tended to prefer executive federalism to cooperative federalism. In executive federalism, the national government sets policy. State governments carry out policies and report progress. In cooperative federalism, levels of government negotiate and adjust. The process is anything but neat. However, it brings national policy into more direct contact with local wishes (Smith 2021).

It also challenges official capabilities. From the initial step in the policy cycle, of identifying issues, proposed directions are subject to negotiation and adjustment between jurisdictions. Within jurisdictions, internal coordination is also needed. Negotiating ministry by ministry is not enough. There is a need for coordination across all relevant agencies. Such coordination requires, in each jurisdiction and before decision and direction, a skilled mix of listening and negotiation. It also requires skills in cross disciplinary analysis and presentation. These prerequisites themselves tend to stimulate capability building. Further, once initial challenges are addressed, the practice of cooperative federalism provides the foundations on which further initiatives in capability building can be built.

For this reason, where constitutional responsibilities are shared between jurisdictions, tackling complex issues of economic, social, and environmental policy tends to benefit from shared consideration. A central government can use legislative and financial power or technological innovation to override or bypass state views, but it may not be able to address the whole problem, especially as seen by diverse communities.

In India, a recent example is agricultural policy. Aiyar and Krishnamurthy (2021) have argued that despite union initiatives ‘the policy priorities and strategies for increasing both farm and non-farm rural incomes will have to be state specific’. They have argued further that ‘In order to respond we need to make two crucial shifts in our national debates. First recognise that there is no getting around states; we have to shed the disenchantment with state failure and yet place accountability firmly on state governments. Second, we need to mobilise to invest in State capacity at the state government level.’

In terms of ‘not getting around the states’, mechanisms exist already to manage relationships between levels of government. One, rarely used, is provided for in the constitution, the Inter-State Council. Another, the NITI Aayog which has representation from state governments, works more closely to the centre. It is also involved in ranking performance in the states. Yet another is the GST Council set up to assist implementation of the goods and services tax introduced in 2016.

However, for such mechanisms to work, they need to be wanted. Neither the union nor state governments have shown conspicuous interest in this. Even the GST Council, recognised as a precedent worth following in intergovernmental relations, has had limited meetings. Outstanding issues regarding the administration of taxes and the sharing of proceeds have remained unresolved. Advocates of the tax acknowledged, even as it was introduced, that the design needed to be improved. Further difficult negotiations were envisaged.

The example of the GST Council suggests that for both the union and state governments to address complex issues of national importance, an overwhelming case must be made. Putting a case together is something people outside the government can do. Indeed, it may be essential if matters considered inconvenient or disruptive are to be addressed. However, for action regarding a case to be taken up by political leaders, especially those in the union government, it needs to be compelling. For this, a trigger point or crisis may be needed.

In terms of investing in capability in the states, the most effective investors are likely to be the states themselves. Self-generated motivations may be complemented by examples from other states and the centre, nonetheless, they need a reason to start. Questions from the centre and rankings by NITI Aayog may be influential for some. Others may act when they face local trigger points. One state has provided an example. In October 2021, the Meghalaya State Capability Forum began. As the Chief Minister states, the forum aims to ‘build a collaborative and empowered public sphere

capable of collective problem-solving' (The Shillong Times). One of the ideas embodied in the initiative is that those close to problems should be actively involved in problem-solving and implementation (Kumar, S et al 2020). The state and the Centre for Policy Research, which has a similar perspective, have agreed to collaborate.

As states improve their own capabilities, they may find it necessary to reconsider the role of local governments. Apart from receiving constitutional recognition, local governments have been treated well by neither union nor state agencies. For many citizens, though, it is the first and critical point of contact with the government. As Doron and Jeffrey (2018) show for waste management, gaps in capability at local levels expose the underbelly even of high-profile national programs such as *Swachh Bharat*. For ways of building up capability, they explore local initiatives.

More broadly, Harriss et al (2020:194) explore movements of working people 'aimed at securing social rights and good public services'. Kruks-Wisner (2018) and Auerbach (2019) deepen the understanding of the potential of such movements. They explore, respectively, access to social welfare in rural areas and provision of public goods and services in urban slums. In their accounts, citizens are active in seeking out local officials and party workers to make claims and secure services and facilities. Bussell (2019) shows how such activity links to the states. Citizens dissatisfied with local responses escalate their claims to state legislators. Legislators see handling such requests as part of their role. They also tend to provide help on a non-contingent and non-partisan basis.

Citizens' claims to local government and state legislators reinforce propositions that state and local governments matter. As a recent review essay on some of the studies cited above has stated, they do so by bringing 'the story of the increasing assertiveness of ordinary people a step forward' (Maiorano 2021: 577). Information about patterns of claims can be invaluable to policy making not only regionally but also nationally. Fostering links between levels and institutions of government that facilitate information transfer and interaction may prove to be invaluable to capability building. Seizing opportunities for intergovernmental collaboration, including a stronger and wider ranging role for local government, would create further momentum. Reflections by leaders on the implications for political effectiveness of claim-making by citizens, whether through individual and small group action or broader social movements, may also stimulate initiatives; so might reflections on the benefits of enabling citizens not only to make claims but also to

create their own opportunities as ‘active participants in the economy’ (Aiyar 2021).

CIVIL SERVICE CAPABILITIES: UNION, STATE AND LOCAL

Indian civil services recruit very good people. The All India Services recruit through examination and interview only exceptional candidates. Workloads are generally very high. However, civil service agencies could do more with the people they recruit. A major issue in discussions of capability is the difference between how civil service work is organised now and how it could be organised.

A range of options is available: recruit different sorts of people, look for different sorts of skills, develop new and improved management and budget systems, make more use of new technologies, restructure jobs, restructure ministries, introduce new ways to judge performance, change approaches to training and development, and conduct regular organisational reviews. Examples of all of these can be seen in India.

A recent addition in other countries has been capability reviews. These are designed to refocus organisational arrangements to meet future challenges (Speagle et al). The following diagram illustrates the factors examined.



Source: Australian Public Service Commission:

https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/styles/full_lg_hi/public/202106/Model%20of%20capability.png?itok=LexTct0W

Such reviews are now regularly carried out in New Zealand and Australia.

However, capability reviews without committed political leadership lose their impact. Major changes in civil service arrangements depend on a double act. First, political leaders must show the way. They need to set overall directions for how the public sector is to work. They need to make clear priorities for policy advice, information, and management and enable civil servants to do their jobs. Second, civil servants at all levels need to work within the political parameters set. When shifts in capability are required, capability reviews and what civil servants themselves suggest, may well be good sources of options. But the flywheel for civil service change must be spun by ministers. If this means new ways of working, new sorts of skills and new sorts of people, civil servants must then manage according to government decisions.

Despite the aspirations of even the most prominent political leaders, the flywheel has rarely spun fast in India. Commissions of inquiry have provided many options but few have been taken up. As prime minister, Narendra Modi has emphasised political leadership and vision. For the late Arun Jaitley, this was the critical variable: ‘It was the same Governmental machinery, the same political system, the same implementation instruments that the Government had at its disposal. It is both the motivation and the leadership which made the vital difference’ (Jaitley 2019).

However, this reflects a view about the singularity of political action and political leadership. Effective government is about more than politics. Electoral success provides opportunity, not policy fulfilment. The extent to which the talents and organisational capabilities of public sector agencies can complement the focus, direction, effectiveness, and accountability of governments needs also to be considered.

In their analysis of public institutions, Kapur et al (2017:13-27) identified a wide range of civil service problems. In summary, they examined:

- personnel failures, including an ‘acute talent crunch’
- legal ambiguities, including contesting views about the powers of federal institutions
- coordination dilemmas, horizontally between agencies and vertically between levels of government
- problems of external accountability, including a lack of transparency in the operations of parliament and of capacity in the civil service to respond to legally mandated requests for information
- problems of internal accountability, including a preoccupation with inputs rather than outcomes

- political interference, including easy transfer by politicians of inconvenient civil servants and strategically deployed inertia when powerful people are accused of wrongdoing.

They were conscious of debate about what should be done and with what priority. They were conscious also about questions of feasibility.

Existing arrangements have their basis in the constitution and in layers of bureaucratic rules and expectations. At independence, the All India Services were seen as a critical component of a 'holding together' federation. They were organised to regulate and control. Strong elements of control continue. Existing arrangements are valued within and outside the civil service by many interests. Points of potential resistance to change are plentiful. In times of scarce employment, a government job is worth striving for. Any changes in skills sought and recruitment methods threaten expectations. So do changes in procedures for placement and promotion. IAS officers and others ranked by seniority and custom object when not promoted to jobs, in Delhi or the states, considered 'theirs by right'. While civil service employment is protected, politicians are accustomed to transferring civil servants who are seen to cause problems. To their dismay, civil servants can also be investigated and prosecuted for breaching rules and making decisions deemed to have caused losses in revenue.

In these circumstances improving policy and management capabilities in the union and state civil services means rethinking what people and governments expect of them. In the meantime, while much political discourse allows little space for policy analysis and advice, a useful step may be to improve ways of matching able people with existing jobs they are fitted for and can do well. Another may be to focus on improvements in management skills and processes. Yet another may just be to let civil servants do their jobs. However, in the longer term, the urgency for rethinking civil service roles at all levels of government cannot be expected to diminish.

The Modi government has recognised the need to improve capability. It has done so, at least at first, in increments. It has found people for tough jobs. It has initiated lateral recruitment to leaven existing structures and processes. It has developed shortcuts through bureaucratic hurdles to deliver benefits and services. By building on IT capabilities, including completion of the *Aadhaar* project, it has deployed the JAM trinity (*Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile*). It has also modified procedures for placements and procedures, including for training and development on entry.

However, IT and lateral recruitment, on which high priority has been placed, do not provide instant results. Commissioning successful IT applications requires skills in strategy and management as well as in IT. Public sector IT projects need to be carefully targeted and must avoid tackling problems for which information management is not the main problem. They take time, especially when significant problems become visible only after work has begun. Lateral recruits without a public sector background take time to find their way around. They also need to learn how to combine operational proficiency and sensitivity to bureaucratic processes with sensitivity to political demands. Recruits from business backgrounds tend to be challenged particularly by the long reach of political influence. Even recruits from other civil services (as happens between New Zealand and Australia and between jurisdictions in Australia) take time to adjust, as this author can attest.

Civil service capabilities in state and local government need to be included too. They need to share in capability improvement programs, especially in managing interactions with other levels of government. Improvements in capabilities in consultation and service delivery with local communities are also relevant. Complaints about civil service high-handedness at local levels are sufficient to suggest that such improvement will not be straightforward.

However, within existing arrangements, wider diffusion of examples of effective practice may provide a foundation for further initiatives. Two accounts by senior civil servants in Delhi about how they got things done provide a good start. One is about developing economic policy by Montek Singh Ahluwalia (Ahluwalia 2020). The other is about developing *Aadhaar* by Ram Sewak Sharma (Sharma 2020).

Mr. Ahluwalia joined the civil service as a lateral recruit to a very senior level only after extensive overseas experience. The protocols of the civil service, he learnt on the job. Invaluable guidance came not only from his mentor, Dr Manmohan Singh, but also from ‘old school’ senior civil servants to whom he learned to listen carefully. Of relevance for capability building is his outline of how economic policy proposals evolved over several years and successive administrations. Of particular significance were discussions with colleagues and examples of economic reform in other Asian countries. In the event, these proposals contributed to the liberalisation decisions of 1991. When a crisis caused the prime minister of the day to call for new ideas, his senior advisers had a package ready.

In contrast, Dr. Sharma joined the *Aadhaar* project as a career IAS officer with a record of senior appointments and personal innovation in IT. In a

project led by a distinguished IT business founder as chair, comprising civil servants and external staff all chosen because they ‘wanted’ to be there, he provided operational and civil service-compatible direction. He and the project faced a mixture of organisational and technological puzzles. They also faced conflict with other agencies that claimed the project should have been theirs or alternatively was impossible. Critical to progress was favourable reception at state level. Critical too, to continuation after the change of government in 2014 and approval by incoming prime minister Modi, was a successful trial of the identity project for monitoring attendance by civil servants at state level.

While these examples are about the experience of very senior officials, they nevertheless suggest that within the civil service there are people with much to demonstrate about effective work in public policy and management. Ahluwalia and Sharma have shown the benefits of expertise in specialist topics gained over time and in collaboration with colleagues. The proposals put forward were relevant, timely, and based on professional analysis. They met the needs of political leaders to address problems of significance. However, wider coordination and consultation were limited. Both the liberalisation decisions of 1991 and the introduction of *Aadhaar* still attract controversy. For this reason, any lessons from these examples need to be put into the contemporary context.

In launching its initiative on state capacity, the Centre of Policy Research recognised the importance of this task. It emphasised the need for public discussion and a shared vision. It envisaged that public discussion would need to be wide-ranging and extend beyond the civil service. As a senior spokesperson said: ‘it would be focused on developing networks and communities of practice across states, sectors and spheres such as government, politics, development partners, academia, civil society and the media’. Further, controversy was to be expected. Capacity building would entail the ‘art of balancing tensions’ (Mekhala Krishnamurthy quoted in Krishnan 2020).

CONCLUSION

Possible agendas to promote improved government capability in India are formidably extensive. Capability is not simply an institutional or systems issue, although both are important, it is a bundle. Just as the interactions in a policy cycle, however tangled, underpin implementable decisions, how the components of public sector organisations interact shapes their ability to accomplish complex and sensitive tasks. Critical interactions that can build or diminish capability are between participants with widely different perspectives, political leaders, and the institutions of the public sector.

In the terms of Kapur et al., the aims of capability initiatives are to create 'virtuous cycles' in which improvements in one component drive improvements in others. Three significant fields for initiatives stand out: increased emphasis on skills and knowledge to provide integrated policy analysis and advice to ministers; improved facility in coordination within and between civil service agencies and between levels of government; and improved emphasis on responsiveness to citizens and communities. In each of these fields, political leadership is needed to drive impacts.

The range of pressing policy issues is wide. Without relevant information about actual conditions, and careful deliberations within government and without, difficult issues resist resolution. Political action has provided opportunities for citizens to raise their voices. As they seek more complex services from the public sector, their political demands may become more complex too. In this event, improved capability in government will help political leaders do their jobs.

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