

Transfer and posting policy for good government with special reference to management of rural health services.

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Recently Andhra Pradesh government have initiated a proposal to develop and adopt a comprehensive transfer and posting policy (Indian Express, 1998). Primary motivation for such a step appears to be a desire to make the public administration more transparent and bereft of political interference. A system of counselling perhaps on the lines of counselling for admission to medical and engineering colleges is sought to be introduced. Essentially counselling would mean having a formal mechanism to take into account the employees choices. Lack of such a mechanism to some extent contributes to high incidence of lobbying. Interest at the political executive level in a comprehensive transfer and posting policy for good governance and sound public administration is a very positive development. The nuts and bolts of the proposed policy have now to be worked out. At this juncture it is pertinent to take stock of the rationale for transfers and its implications for the organisation as well as the persons affected by a transfer decision.

In this paper I have discussed various aspects relevant to development of a sound transfer and posting policy from the dual perspectives of the organisation and the employee respectively. I have then proposed certain policy alternatives that should be part of a transfer and posting policy. I have used the context of health services since health care delivery is highly human power intensive and hence provides the most complex setting for playing out of various forces seeking to influence some real or anticipated transfer and postings. Finally I discuss certain commonly occurring myths and false hopes about this subject. It will be desirable to clearly identify what can be achieved by a sound transfer and posting policy and what can not be achieved by a policy document alone.

I. Managing human resources for large enterprises:

Human resources are an important means of rendering the health services. In case of organisations consisting of institutions located at one place or covering a limited area, transfer and posting is non issue. Most of the voluntary agencies covering a small geographical area, would naturally not have much of transfer and posting problem. What ever little need for transfer, that may be there, can be taken care of on the basis of manager's personal knowledge of each post and person. On the other hand a rural health care organisation, particularly in the governmental sector, is characterised by a widely spread network of health institutions and posts. Transfers become inevitable in a big organisation. Proper cadre management is very important to keep the staff in a streamlined state. Transfer and posting is an important tool of managing a cadre and tailoring of available human resources to the needs of the institutions. Transfers are a means of deploying the human resources on the basis of organisational priorities and constraints. Among other things regular transfers

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prevent the tendency for stagnation, complacency and resignation to lower levels of functioning which are normally bred by extended familiarity with the surrounding. Transfers encourage broader interpersonal interaction by a person, as well as provide opportunities for freshness in work environment. Transfer and posting is a matter which is very important to many government functionaries. Erratic transfer and posting can be very demotivating for field functionaries. Hence a definite transfer and posting policy for each category of employees under any administrative unit will go a long way in improving the morale of the field functionaries and motivate them.

II. Contents of a transfer and posting policy:

A transfer and posting policy should spell out minimum details as given below:-

1. Clearly spell out the objectives of transfer and posting of the category of employees to whom the policy will be applied.
2. Provide for classification of various stations on the basis of availability of infrastructure and the distance travelled to get the non available services.
3. Categorise the posts in a cadre on the basis of functional criteria.
4. Fix the normal tenure for various categories of positions.
5. Provide for treatment of commonly occurring transfer and posting events, like first posting, reposting, posting on promotion, annual and mid term transfers etc.
6. Provide for balanced distribution of vacancies.
7. Provide for incentives for postings to difficult stations, e.g.. compensatory allowance, preferences for grant of vehicle loans, option for next posting, etc.

The transfer and posting policy may be formally proclaimed or informally adopted by a manager. Irrespective of it's formality it would be desirable to see that the employees know the policy adopted towards their transfer and posting.

III. Why is transfer necessary? And when is transfer bad?

Every transfer and posting has a lot of impact on the life of the person transferred as well as the organisation in which he is serving. The impact can be positive, negative or indifferent. Hence it is pertinent to understand as to why is transfer necessary? Thus the various determinants of a transfer and posting policy can be organisational and personal. Both are discussed below.

A. Organisational determinants of transfer and posting policy:

1. Complementarity of resources: Transfer of a person having skills in any particular area to an institution, place or area where there is need for such skills can result in a lot of complementarity between existing manpower or equipment available there. For example a doctor skilled in tubectomy operation can be expected to give better output by posting of a nurse or female health worker who has skills in assisting in surgery or setting up of facilities for tubectomy operation in camp. Similarly it may be possible to start a service to satisfy the felt need in an area by transferring a person possessing the skill.
2. Tenure: A reasonable tenure at each station or post is essential for any one to grasp the mode of working in that place, plan for his work methods, execute them and consolidate the same. Hence transfer of a person after a short tenure in any station would adversely affect the net service output by the person.

3. Exposure of each member of a cadre to the variations of work environment and types of work leads to balanced manpower development. If this is done it would be easier to manage crises as each would have been exposed to all kinds of work expected out of the cadre. This also gives a lot of insight and understanding to each person about the role expected of people posted in other stations and reduces scope for misunderstanding and interpersonal problems.
4. Human management: Some times two people who are otherwise good in their work may not be able to pull on well with each other. This affects the productivity of each. In a different setting there may be a lot of public sensitivity about a person. On the other hand continuance of a certain person may affect the credibility of an institution among public and it may not be always due to anything for which the individual can be directly held responsible.
5. Freshness in work environment: Transfer of personnel also prevents the tendency for stagnation, complacency and relegation to lower levels of functioning, which are normally bred by extended familiarity with the surroundings. Transfers provide opportunity for freshness of work environment. This can result in tremendous growth and development of the employees personality. Human beings are known to respond to challenges in ;their environment. Changes in work environment throws up new challenges.

B. Personal determinants of transfer and posting policy:

The impact of transfer on the personal life of an employee can be many and varied. Certain factors personal to an employee may be relevant for the organisation to be considered while taking up transfer and postings.

1. Children's education: The impact of transfer on one's children's education is of great significance to the employee. The new place may not be having any school for his child or the curriculum may be different and so on...
2. Spouse's employment: The work place of the spouse is another significant factor. The spouse may be employed in the same organisation or another one. Normally a person would like to be posted at the same or a nearby place. Couples working in government commonly have a misunderstanding that it is the governments duty and obligation to post them together. Our society is characterised by continuing traditions of household economy. Many household chores get done by the housewife. It has an economic significance. But we do not calculate them in terms of money. When both husband and wife start working they welcome the additional income but are not willing to make adequate compensatory provision to appoint alternative personnel for the household chores. Many working couples also continue to aspire for the same level of involvement in family life as they could afford while one of them was employed. They expect that it is government's duty to enable them to continue their lifestyle. But the reality is that working couples must reconcile and accept compromises in their own comfort and life style. The government should try to make positive gesture and help a couple to the extent possible without sacrificing the need of the institution. Rarely there may be a situation where an employee seeks posting away from her spouse's place of posting to escape harassment or torture. This may look odd but can happen in the context of our social system.

3. Preparatory to retirement: A person going to retire soon may like to be posted to a place where he hopes to settle after retirement.
4. Convenience of communications to Home: Many people would like to have a convenient communication link to reach their native places when they go on leave or have some emergency in home.
5. Loss of private practice: Many people with professional skills indulge in private practice irrespective of whether they are permitted to do so. A transfer may affect the private practice clientele and reduce income or promise a better clientele in the new station.
6. Nativity: A government servant carries with him certain amount of formal and informal authority. The system of governance and public service adopted in our country consists of an independent and permanent civil service. The implication is that government policy can change at the instance of the political executive. But when it comes to application of government policy, it should be done in a dispassionate, disinterested and impartial manner. A person is bound to develop close personal affiliations with some one or other in the area where he is born and brought up. He may have to face embarrassing situations when it comes to taking decisions involving his close acquaintances. This is in the formal sector. In the informal arena also close familiarity on the part of a government servant with certain people may create apprehensions in the public mind. Hence generally effort is made to avoid posting of an employee in his native area. This is done more so for officers and higher level posts.
7. Other personal problems / issues: Apart from these commonly identifiable personal issues there would be many more arising in the personal life of many employees and affected by the location of the employee himself.
8. The motivational impact of transfer and posting on an employee is a function of the perceived contribution of the action to achievement of organisational objectives and its impact on his own personal life.

IV. Classification of stations:

1. It is desirable to classify all stations where there is a health institution, on the basis of some infrastructure criteria. Among other things the following criteria should be taken for consideration while classifying the stations.
 - i. Educational infrastructure.
 - ii. Availability of residential accommodation.
 - iii. Medical infrastructure.
 - iv. Road, rail and telecom network.
 - v. Recreational opportunities.
 - vi. Distance travelled for infrastructure facilities not available in the station.
2. Government of AP (1969) have classified PHCs, for posting of doctors to primary health centres as follows:
 - i. PHCs with residential quarters and availability of schools.
 - ii. PHCs without residential quarters and school.
 - iii. PHCs in agency areas.

V. Categorisation of posts:

The work content of various posts in a cadre may be different from each other in terms of public contact, professional skill development, touring etc. It would be desirable to categorise the posts into functional groups on the basis of a few dominant criteria. For example one categorisation could be into field posts, desk posts and mixed posts. Another categorisation could be into extension posts and hospital posts etc. Government of AP (1969) have distinguished between teaching posts i.e. in medical colleges, and non teaching posts. In the medical colleges a further distinction was made between senior professors of colleges with PG courses and others. In another context (Government of AP, 1987) focal point posts and non focal point posts have been referred to for purposes of transfer and posting. Apparently it means the importance of a posts for running the core functions of the dept. A more functional categorisation without any status connotation may be more advisable, to avoid misunderstanding and demotivation among the staff who find themselves occupying the so called non focal posts.

Classification of stations and posts once arrived at, should not be varied frequently. Instead a periodicity should be fixed for such revisions, so as to take care of mistakes of facts and latest development in the area.

VI. Tenure:

A reasonable tenure is essential for any one to grasp the state of affairs, plan for his approach, execute and consolidate his plan. A post requiring very routine and highly stereotyped type of work output may not require more time for any one to understand it. Thus a lower normal tenure in such places would not affect productivity. On the other hand a position requiring the incumbent to develop detailed knowledge of the area and intimate understanding of it's people would require a higher tenure for any one to deliver some results. Thus fixation of an optimum and normal tenure for any post has to take into account the functional requirements of the post and many of it's associated attributes. There would be some people who would not like to continue at a particular station. For them there is need to fix a minimum tenure at a station before their request for transfer can be taken up for consideration. It is desirable to fix the request tenure at 40 to 50 % of the normal tenure. In AP the normal tenure for medical officers in non teaching posts is three years. For teaching posts it is five years and for senior professors in PG medical colleges it is seven years.

VII. Common transfer and posting events:

A. First posting:

This may be after direct recruitment or in case of recruitment by transfer. It would be desirable to ask all selected candidates to give their preferences up to three or five stations for their first posting. Due consideration should be given to the place preferences of the candidates.

B. Reposting:

The question of reposting arises, when some one returns from leave or long period of absence. One of the strategies adopted by unwilling employees to avoid a place of posting is to proceed on leave. They would report for duty after the post uncomfortable to them is filled up or they think that a posting to the place of their

choice can be manoeuvred. Hence as far as possible, care should be taken to repost all those who did not complete their tenure in one station to the same station or a nearby station.

C. Posting on promotion:

Posting on promotion is characterised by a raise in the level and rank of the employee. Many a times the person is placed in positions where he has to supervise, control and lead the work of more number of people. From this angle it would be desirable to post a person on promotion to another station. Otherwise there may be some delicacy and human problems arising out of a situation where the employee is called upon to supervise the work of his erstwhile colleagues. Another aspect of the promotion is that a person would normally be willing for a change in station consequent to promotion except off course the few who would forego their promotion in lieu of retention at the same place.

D. Annual and mid term transfers:

Annual transfers are generally effected at the end of one academic year and beginning of another. This is because of the importance laid on the children's education. It is expected that a family would be in better position to shift to a new station during the inter academic year gap. In Andhra Pradesh annual transfers are effected during the months of April and May. Transfers effected in other months are referred to as mid term transfers. It is desirable to restrict the number of annual and midterm transfers on the basis of percentage relationships to the total posts in the category.

VIII. Balanced distribution of vacancies:

Vacancies in each category of posts and class of stations should be distributed in an equitable manner. Otherwise more developed centres with attractive infrastructure facilities would continuously getting their full quota of men, where as less developed areas would be disproportionately devoid of personnel.

IX. Dealing with a transfer case:

Transfer and posting cases arise on a day to day basis, though a good number of cases get handled during the annual general transfers. Such cases may be due to administrative reasons like need to fill up a vacancy at a particular place, need to transfer a person out of a station or reposting to some one returning from leave etc. Transfer and posting cases would come up on account of employee requests and politico bureaucratic lobbying. How does one deal with a transfer and posting case as and when it arises? Normally there will be a tendency on the part of the office not to put up all relevant material in a case. This may be due to various factors like inadequate understanding as to what constitute relevant information in a transfer and posting case, laziness in securing information not readily available, or deliberate and selective feeding of information in an effort to lead a decision etc. The administrator should be clear in his mind as to what information he will consider while analysing and deciding upon a transfer and posting case. It would be prudent to examine the following aspects before arriving at decision in transfer and posting case:

1. Posting history and bio data of the employee(s) concerned.
2. Current and resultant status of the relieving institution.
3. Current and resultant status of the receiving institution.

X. Disciplinary role of transfers:

Transfers are commonly perceived as a means of punishing errant employees. It is not a healthy managerial practice. By transferring an errant person to another station the only thing that is achieved is that the other station and its clientele have to suffer the errant employee. The correct approach would be to take disciplinary action against such persons.

XI. Financial implications of transfer:

Every transfer and posting involves some additional financial expenditure for the government by way of transfer TA. Hence transfers should be effected only towards achievement of organisational objectives. However some times banning of transfers has been seen as a means of saving government expenditure. Such actions can arise only out of inadequate understanding of the role of transfers in any cadre management. Regular and planned transfers contribute to keep a big organisation fit and streamlined. By trying to save the expenditure on TA, one is actually contributing to wastage of salary, because a truncated demotivated and aimless cadre is as good as not being there.

XII. Myths and lores about transfer and posting policy:

A comprehensive transfer and posting policy is no doubt a healthy public administration tool for good governance. It will, however, be wrong to assume that a comprehensive and uniform transfer and posting policy will solve all personnel related problems and personnel related corruption in government. I will pick up a few such very common misconceptions and try to clarify their implications.

Designing a system devoid of any discretion with managers is like asking a train driver to operate an vehicle with fixed speed and no break! Secondly it is being hoped that there is such a policy which can insulate transfers and postings from political interference. Specific circumstances of a case will make the same political action as intervention or interference. Designing a policy that will remove the scope for political interference will also remove the scope for political intervention as well. What will happen to genuine cases of peoples representatives trying to get efficient civil servants to work in areas relevant to their constituencies? If politicians can not intervene in matter of transfer and postings, how will they manage the affairs of the state. Human power is an important resource for government service delivery. Taking the power of transfer and posting away by making the rules very rigid will in effect remove the capacity for deployment and redeployment of resources. How do we then reconcile the need for rigidity to remove scope for personal bias and corruption in the matter of transfers and at the same time keep required flexibility with managers for optimal deployment of human resources to match organisation goals and aspirations? The answer is to clearly lay down the goals and objectives of transfer, the type of personal needs that are to be recognised, specify overall norms, and allow flexibility to managers to consider each transfer and posting related decision event against them. In addition it will be desirable to allow managers exception to rules in specific cases but cap the aggregate number of exceptions within a clearly defined boundary condition. The need for uniform transfer and posting policy is being talked about. The needs, work culture and service delivery pattern of government departments differ quite a good deal. Specifying an uniform transfer and posting policy would not be optimal for all areas. For example cadres dealing with regulatory services or the so called focal posts (Government of AP

1966) may require relatively faster, say once in three years, turnover of incumbents in any given position. In case of a service delivery department like say the health or education services longer tenure, say up to six years, and some times permanent tenure for exceptional professionals rooted to the work environment of a particular institution, would be desirable.

Some people believe that it is possible to find foolproof methods that can guarantee good governance. That is a myth in general and is more so a myth in the case of transfer and postings. Our problem, however, are not the fools but the clever ones, who quickly figure out how to manipulate transfer and postings for personal favours at the cost of institutional interest. All that a comprehensive transfer and posting policy will do is to put in place a set of shared rules of the game so that clever political - bureaucratic manipulators are held accountable to them. Look at it from a different perspective. If there is some thing like a foolproof policy then, in all probability, it is creativity-proof as well. The only foolproof solution that a society should work towards, to give itself good governance, is to engender good leaders with high moral values. At a more practical level political executives seeking to cleanse the system should start by encouraging potential leaders who have high motivation, ethical and moral values and put them in secondary political executive positions. These leaders chosen as ministers, chairpersons of public sector undertaking and various statutory, advisory bodies should in turn cultivate a professionalism and high level of competence among the cadres of personnel in their charge. People in turn should closely watch the performance of their leaders in terms of their contributions towards maintenance of efficient and responsive cadres of public servants.

Finally resolutions to draft fresh policy documents are welcome. But there is an adverse side effect of such resolutions. They tend to postpone action. Take for example the case of transfer and postings. Already a large body of guidelines and instructions exist. The Andhra Pradesh government have periodically issued compilation of instructions on transfer and postings. The latest that I am aware of was issued in 1987 (Government of AP, 1987). It will be desirable to prepare annual reports giving summary statistic of transfer and postings and the extent to which government instructions were followed. These reports should be placed before the legislature as a part of the demands for grant of salaries so that peoples representatives get a chance to examine the incidence of deviations from policy. Such an exercise will also facilitate self appraisal by respective departments.

XIII.References:

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