

New Management trends in Corporations

Hitherto management know-how for Sri Lanka corporations has been transferred from largely Western countries by means of pre-packaged management courses and seminars. As these packages had grown up in a social milieu different from that of Sri Lanka very often the "advanced management know-how" transmitted could not be used or properly utilised. Within the last few months the National Institute of Management has been involved in new activities which perhaps unconsciously promise new forms of organisation arising from the Sri Lanka context itself. It is also interesting that some of the results that have occurred as a consequence of these experiments are reminiscent of much of the *avantgarde* work being done in other countries.

One such experiment referred to occurred in the Thulhiriya Textile Plant where approximately 80 persons—mostly highly educated workers with G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) and above, plus a few executives were chosen as a part of the exercise. They were given duty leave for the entire period of the experiment which has now lasted several weeks. In addition to lectures on society and economy given by University personnel to this target group, they were exposed to a session where the entire managerial function was thrown to the group as a whole. The group was requested to sub-divide itself into sub-groups according to any problems that they wished pursued. Some of the points raised by the large 80-member group, like changes in organisational personnel were considered to be yet outside the purview of self-management.

There were six sub-groups which chose their individual problems to be tackled. One group wanted to put up a housing scheme, a second wished to increase the living conditions of employees by a new salary structure. A third group wanted to use scrap material. A fourth group wanted to run the canteen. A fifth to make doffin boxes and a sixth to run the

pre-spinning section on an entirely self-managed basis.

Self Management

Each sub-group decided initially on some preliminary schemes. Thus the housing group wanted to put up a housing scheme and the living conditions group introduced a detailed salary structure. The doffin boxes group produced plans to make a doffin box at Rs. 17.50 as opposed to the contractors' price of Rs. 75/-. The most interesting suggestion was from the self-management group which wanted to be given only the resources for production like materials, machines and maintenance, whilst the group undertook to do their total labour management function. They also suggested that they would do away with clocking of times, as well as leave chits etc. The feeling of the group was that flexibility was to be allowed in these matters and that the group itself would control any members who were habitual late comers or absentees.

Another feature that arose from the working of the groups was that the democratically structured groups (they chose their own leaders) saw the need for specialised knowledge which was not possessed by the group. Thus the housing scheme group soon realised the need for an indepth civil engineering knowledge, as well as that of surveying to scientifically and economically construct the housing scheme. The result was that the group now began to use the technical personnel available in the Corporation like engineers and accountants as resource personnel.

The doffin boxes group after some confusion on the part of management, produced cheaper doffin boxes and the scrap group cleared the mountain of scrap in the region. The self management group however disintegrated because their scheme of flexible hours without time cards and leave chits was considered too strong a departure by management. Also when the question of

what to do with absentees, discipline and hours of work in concrete terms arose, this group could not come to a very definitive decision.

The Thulhiriya experiment, although it has given mixed results because of the unpreparedness of both workers and management to some of the problems of self-management has inadvertently given rise to two important results which are path breaking even in the international management field. For instance, the housing group's decision to use technical personnel as resource material is very similar to the new thinking in the Western world on organisation that has come under the loose heading of "Post Industrial Management". These recent techniques have emphasised that the earlier hierarchical organisation is not functional in times of change and innovation and have recommended so-called open system designs where there is direct interaction of the average employee on the problems of the organisation.

These systems also have similarities to organisations in China where cadres and specially the three-in-one committees (cadres, technicians and ordinary workers) since the Cultural Revolution interact directly with the environment and use technical know-how as resource material.

The Kaiya

The Thulhiriya self-management group's request for flexible hours of time also finds an echo in the flex-time concept which has been increasingly adopted within the last three years or so in the Western countries. It has also echoes to our traditional forms of collective organisation, for instance the *Kaiya*, where a tightly structured time system did not exist, but the time as well as other productive factors were controlled by the members of the *Kaiya* collectively.

The results of the experiment at Thulhiriya are at the moment still mixed but its great significance lies in that an attempt has been made firstly to trust workers and secondly to evolve new forms of organisational control suited for the country.