

# PROFESSIONAL COBWEBS

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The process of dynamic adjustment of price and quantity of commodity is defined by the Cobweb Theorem. If individuals determine the type and kind of training they desire to undergo with an agreement on the prevailing existent salary structure, it would be easy and feasible to use the Cobweb theorem to study and analyse the Cyclical pattern of shortage or surplus of trained professionals like the doctors and the engineers, as it describes movements around a particular equilibrium point (CETERIS PARIBUS).

Surplus of skilled personnel has to be looked upon as a great myth from the social viewpoint. For instance, if the skilled personnel agree to serve within the prevailing market price of their salary structure, there will not be a surplus, and a shortage. When trained and skilled professionals refuse to work under difficult economic conditions, insist on higher salaries and contribute to the exodus, shortages emerge.

In the United States, in the early 1960s there was a great concern about the "Shortage" of engineers, scientists, teachers and other trained professionals. But in the 1970s this shortage apparently became a "Surplus" with very high unemployment rates among these professions. This resulted in declining enrollment in engineering and Ph. D. Programs and students began to switch to other fields of training where there were attractive and promising employment prospects.

This is an example to illustrate the Cyclical pattern of periodic over and understaffing situations of trained personnel.

Generally, when a commodity is in short supply for a short term the price tends to rise, which elicits greater supply such that short term shortages are effectively eliminated. This is the well

known Static theory in economics. However, when there is a lag in the "Production" process as in the case of training of doctors and engineers, the path of adjustment may be Cyclical, converging, diverging or perpetually oscillating around an equilibrium.

Cobweb analysis was originally used to explain Cyclical movements in the prices of agricultural products. But with growth and development of industry, Cobweb analysis became useful in planning, developing and marketing technologically sophisticated products.

In the present context of Specialization and the emergence of super specialities linked with Biotechnological development, newer fields of Professionalisation in economics, business, industry, education, science and medical technology appear to create problem areas in the training, distribution and effective utilization of highly trained and skilled personnel. In terms of productive utilization of trained and skilled personnel mostly the loss affluent countries are at the receiving end. Those who have been trained abroad remain frustrated or go in search of greener pastures as their knowledge skills and services are not being productively and effectively used in such countries. Those who do not desire to go to developed countries are under utilized, as the infrastructure and the economic environment are not favourable to support and encourage them. The priorities of developing countries are quite distinct and different from those of the developed countries.

A new development in Sri Lanka has been the recent devolution of powers to the Provincial Councils. Several functions including Health Education and Administration have been handed over to the Provinces together with substantial resource modifications. The manpower transfers associated with such reforms could be eventful and quite

amazing. To make operational plans realistic, staffing norms devised to revise, review and redetermine the total requirements of manpower on an acceptable time schedule-would be a prime task of any expanding department.

In such an exercise the work load in terms of quality, diversity and quantity in a time span as well as subjective considerations (financial and technical) along with the prevailing political climate have to be given considerable insight.

In the absence of accurate and comprehensive data Crash Measures may be adopted, making optimum use of the available data, meet knowledgeable experienced expertise, and think of the future development during the manpower planning exercise.

In Sri Lanka and in many other less developed countries, the lower and middle segments of the work force pyramid remain yet to be satisfied with the prevailing service comforts, incentives and benefits. Overwork and thin pay would not germinate a satisfied work force. Work and time motion studies and KAP studies on workers satisfaction and morale would generate new insights on efficient and effective manpower utilization and development, if we are interested in refining our services together with job enlargement, enrichment and quality management.

#### References:

1. New York Times (1973), "Engineers" Help Wanted Again March 11, P.E. 9.
2. Lyall Katharine (1974), Microeconomic Issues of the 70s p19. Harper & Row, Publishers, New York.