

**Secretarial Skill Development and Institutional Arrangement for
Assistant Staff Training in Nepal**
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Abstract

Clerical and secretarial training is offered to develop skills required for assistant level staff in government offices, public enterprises and other organizations. The Assistant Staff Training Centre (now known as the Centre for Secretarial Skill Training) was established for offering clerical and secretarial training to non-gazetted staff of the government of Nepal in 1991 under the umbrella of the Nepal Administrative Staff College to improve their job performance for organizational effectiveness. Secretarial skill development continues to be a challenge to most government ministries, departments and district administration. It is one of the important matters of discussion at the conferences of administrative reforms in any country. This article discusses briefly course of actions taken by the government of Nepal to offer and improve training services for assistant-level staff of public and non-public organizations through the creation of a separate institute for the training of support-level staff at national level.

Introduction

The civil service in most developing countries is usually the largest single employer. According to the latest estimate, the number of assistant-level staff is nearly 63,000 in the civil service and around 30,000 in the public enterprises (NASC proposal 2009). They have a significant contribution to make in the programmes of national economic development. The organizations which employ them have their obligation to put them through office management and clerical trainings and other programmes required in relation to their needs to update and upgrade the quality of their contribution.

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Brief History of Secretarial Skill Development Training

Before the advent of democracy in the country in 1951, no orientation class was given to new recruits. Nor was there any particular system of training as such – whether pre-service or in-service. During Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher's regime, the minimum qualification for entry into civil service was fixed for the first time in the history of public administration in Nepal. CHARPAS (Nepali Sresta plus legal & clerical knowledge, records keeping & book-keeping, arithmetic and accounts) as an entry qualification was introduced to require of all candidates clerical knowledge and secretarial skills to be able to adjust themselves to the established procedures (Dixit 2005).

For the purpose of inducting new recruits into the job there was a practice of a few week attachment to public authorities -- to a working clerk if they were clerk-level candidates and to an officer in the case of officer-level candidates. During attachment the new recruits had an opportunity to observe office mechanics and its operation systems together with storage systems, retrieval systems and the use of usual office room apparatus. Thus, training was imparted to civil servants through apprenticeship training. Modern system of training in Nepal is a recent phenomenon.

With the dawn of democracy in the country in 1951, there came an awakening of the need for education and training. The necessity for the spread of education along with training of trainers all across the country was keenly felt. In cognizance of perennial need for the civil servants to adjust to new knowledge, new skills and new attitudes, the O&M Study Division was created by the government sometime around 1957 to survey existing civil service facilities and to develop modern schemes of training to impart appropriate training to assistant-level staff of all echelons (Long term Strategic Orientation 1988). Those under training had to learn principles and ideas which have general applicability in the practice of public administration e.g. being able to make decisions, to discriminate between important and unimportant matters, to apply administrative and operational procedures, to handle correspondence, to prepare (clerical) reports, to write communicative memos and notes etc.

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Until the Central Training Department was created in 1966, the Department of Public Administration was responsible for conducting administrative training for newly recruited class III gazetted officers. Later, the Central Training Department conducted training courses for Chief District Officers (CDOs) and other civil servants including assistant-level staff (Pradhan 2007). Subsequently three institutes were entrusted with the task of training the government employees. These institutions were: (a) The Training Wing of the Ministry of General Administration (b) Panchayat Training Centre under the Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development and (c) Centre for Economic Development and Administration of the Tribhuvan University.

The training wing of the Ministry of General Administration trained the Class III Officers and all of the assistant-level staff of the government. The Panchayat Training Centre focused on the civil servants and political workers involved in village and district panchayats. CEDA's training programmes were geared towards the government and corporate middle-level managers.

Establishment of Assistant Staff Training Centre

The establishment of the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) represents an important milestone in the history of administrative training in Nepal. The College was formally opened on July 16, 1982 under government management but subsequently became an autonomous institution on September 27, 1982 with the coming into effect of the Nepal Administrative Staff College Act 1982. It conducted both in-service, pre-service and other specialized courses in several management disciplines for the officer-level staff of the government and public enterprises to improve the quality of delivery of services to the people.

On the 10th October 1991 the Assistant Staff Training Centre (ASTC) was created and amalgamated with the Nepal Administrative Staff College for the purpose of providing office management and clerical and secretarial skill training to assistant-level staff of the government and public enterprises.

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The main objectives of Assistant Staff Training Centre (now known as the Centre for Secretarial Skill Training) as set out in the terms of reference prepared for it are as follows (NASC annual Report 2009):

- Identify the need for secretarial skill training in government, non-government and private organizations;
- Develop market and deliver innovative, customer-focused and quality training packages including mobile training in remote areas of the country for both the public and the private sector customers;
- Offer consulting service packages (including responding to demands) to support customers for improvements in secretarial services in their respective organizations;
- Design and undertake various research and case-study projects in the area of secretarial services for developing training materials and improving research skills of staff;
- Generate additional resources and enhance its earning capacity;
- Provide an organizational set-up for challenging work, creative thinking and innovative actions; and
- Innovate and initiate better professional practices and present a role model.

Major Functions

The major functions of CSST are described in terms of both functional and thematic streams. Each is described below:

Functional Streams

CSST has four core functional streams as follows:

- Training and development function (both institutional and in-company programmes);
- Consulting service function;
- Research function; and
- Systems/process development function (development and implementation of internal improvement programmes).

Thematic Streams

CSST has been developing and implementing specialized type of programmes mainly in the area of secretarial service management. Specifically, this has included the following thematic streams:

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- Office management systems and practices
- Self management/self development skills (i.e., personal skills in delivering secretarial services)
- Public relation
- Productivity and quality management
- Office record management
- Correspondence and reporting (communication)

The Centre for Secretarial Skill Training (former Assistant Staff Training Centre) under the umbrella of NASC has been running smoothly since its establishment in 1991 playing a major role in the country for assistant-level staff development. The Centre's overall activities have increased considerably with the corresponding improvement in its resources and facilities and it has so far executed 353 training courses of various types for 8452 participants. A snap shot of year-wise distribution of training courses is set out in the table below:

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Table 1: Year-wise distribution of training courses

Year	No. of Programme	No. of Participants
1991-1996	115	2922
1996-1997	21	444
1997-1998	21	417
1998-1999	15	363
1999-2000	23	519
2000-2001	23	569
2001-2002	19	415
2002-2003	19	400
2003-2004	20	467
2004-2005	23	472
2005-2006	12	324
2006-2007	15	374
2007-2008	11	315
2008-2009	16	415
Total:	353	8452

Source: NASC Annual reports 1991-2009.

The secretarial skill training is offered not only at NASC in Kathmandu. It has been carried to outlying regions and districts also by several mobile teams. These teams move from development region to region to conduct secretarial skill training for assistant-level staff of the government and public enterprises. The Centre for Secretarial Skill Training (CSST) has provided mobile training (as on July 2, 2007) for some 1633 assistant-level staff since its creation in 1991.

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The work offered by the mobile teams is of the same quality and carries the same credit as similar work offered at NASC in Kathmandu. The certificates awarded upon successful completion of the training course show no distinction between Kathmandu and the outlying regions.

Separate National Level Institute for the Training of Assistant-Level Staff

The nature of training required for assistant-level staff is indeed different from the management training needed by officer-level staff. The report on "Training for Non-Gazetted Staff" prepared in 1984 by John Harrison of Easleigh College of Further Education UK finds mention that the two forms of training should not be integrated. Time and again the issue of amalgamation of Assistant Staff Training Centre with NASC has surfaced in the reform measures of NASC. It has often been one of the topics of discussion when the Training, Consulting and Research Committee¹ (TCRC) meets at NASC. The committee has a feel of the need for disbanding the Centre of Secretarial Skill Training (CSST) within NASC and creating a separate Institute of Secretariat Training at national level for assistant-level staff of the government, public enterprises and other organizations.

The government as well as the College values secretarial skill training courses conducted by the Centre for Secretarial Skill Training (CSST). Nevertheless looking back the performance of the Centre's past several years, the need for its organizational restructuring has been realized. Such a need has not merely been desirable but imperatively important to give a much wider coverage to assistant-level staff training for meeting the objective aimed at by "Training for All" programme of the government. The percentage of assistant-level staff who has received training at NASC is very low vis-a-vis officers trained during the same period.

¹ It is the senior management team of NASC to look after programme design and implementation and also important matters relating to the College. It normally meets once a week.

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It may be well noted that 90 percent of the civil servants are support-level staff (NASC proposal 2009). Training attendance by level of participants – officer-level and assistant-level shows that the percentage of assistant level-staff receiving training at NASC is nearly 31 percent. The show is indeed alarming. More information about it is schematically presented in the table below:

Year	No. of Training			No. of Participants		
	Officer Level	Assistant Level	Total	Officer Level	Assistant Level	Total
1991-1996	171	115	386	3749	2922	6671
1996-1997	37	21	58	769	444	1213
1997-1998	51	21	72	1470	417	1887
1998-1999	48	15	63	605	363	968
1999-2000	64	23	87	808	519	1327
2000-2001	38	23	61	778	569	1347
2001-2002	34	19	53	701	415	1116
2002-2003	43	19	62	883	400	1283
2003-2004	67	20	87	1903	467	2370
2004-2005	74	23	97	2013	472	2485
2005-2006	70	12	82	1820	324	2144
2006-2007	47	15	62	1256	374	1630
2007-2008	49	11	60	1099	315	1414
2008-2009	53	16	69	1201	415	1652
Total:	846	353	1199	19055	8452	27507

Source: NSC Annual Reports 1991-2009

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Nepal is still lacking in a single training agency at national level to deal with clerical and secretarial skill development training for assistant-level staff. This lapse has adversely impacted the work performance of assistant-level staff all across the country. In order to seek redress, the government is expected to make a separate institutional arrangement for assistant staff training in the country with creation of a network of training centres at sectoral, regional and department levels coordinated by a central level assistant training centre (NASC Strategic Plan for 2009/010 – 2013/014). It must be recognized from the very start that such training institute should have training cadres of its own if it is to give continuity to the major functions that CSST has been performing for achieving its stated objectives:

The principal strategies for the up-and-coming institute should initially be as follows using NASC facilities where appropriate:

- **Curriculum development and design:** Demand for training is not merely list of courses. It is an articulated recognition of a number of needs integrated with career development and planned within agreed priorities and affordability. The following issues will need to be addressed:
 - A vision for the clerical and secretarial service from rule based to performance based culture
 - A policy framework for training and development at national and ministerial level
 - Identifying and bridging gaps in performance
 - Undertaking post-course action plans and follow-up of these action plans in all training courses
 - Assessing training and performance
 - Training and development integrated with career development
- **Creating structure for Instructors:** The required training instructors can be assembled mainly from NASC with some also from government ministries.
- **Accommodation of the Institute:** For the present, the CSST Building located on the spacious site at NASC can provide accommodation.

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- **Equipment and Furniture:** It should be in the forefront of development in office technology and have examples of modern electronic and electrostatic devices.

Practical exercises emphasizing skills directly related to clerical jobs contribute to greater effectiveness in office management and secretarial classes. In view of this, the following approaches need to be adopted in designing the instruction systems and courses.

- **Work performance identification:** Course participants' learning expectations are identified and the course contents are developed to incorporate them into the programme to meet their requirements from the course.
- **Assistant-level Job Structures:** Job structures of assistant-level staff should be examined to give them greater job satisfaction and encourage them to be more responsible and exercise more initiative. (A supervisory role should be created for grade I assistant-level staff)
- **Practical Content:** Much emphasis is given to the practical content of the course e.g. giving and receiving feedback, interviewing, interacting etc. without, of course, neglecting the concept oriented parts. Skill development sessions are given high priority to enrich participants' experiences of actual job situations.
- **Participative Methodology:** Emphasis is placed on the maximum use of those methodologies which provide greater opportunity for course participants to be actively involved in the learning process.
- **Pre-Course and Post-Course Assessment:** Changes in the participants' formal knowledge and information, skills and attitude as a result of course inputs should be well assessed. A Simple assessment form is developed which is also used as an instrument for the validation of course.

General Office Functions Common to All Assistant-level staff

Listed below are some of the core office functions common to all assistant-level staff. Instruction systems and training course designed for them should enable them to perform them.

- **Collection and dissemination of Information:** Assistant-level staff is continuously engaged in the collection and dissemination of relevant information.

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- **Processing and Arranging Information:** Available pieces of information are processed and arranged to make them more functional from the viewpoint of management. For instance, accounts of expenses are kept in the form required by the financial standard.
- **Recording Official Communication:** The information received is recorded properly to be able to retrieve it when needed. The information which will have no future use is destroyed. Records of certain information are preserved for a short period. There are records which are preserved for a long period and even permanently.
- **Maintaining organizational relations and outside relations:** It is an important function of an office to project a good image of the organisation in the eyes of the public.

In view of the nature of the assistant-level staff, tips of the following categories will normally be among those required to be taken up for developing office organisation and administration session plans: (PP Boyle 1991)

- Assisting administrators in supervision
- Setting targets and time everyday for work planning
- Keeping checklists/Making "Things to do" list
- Noting priority items and attending to them first
- Keeping frequently consulted materials to hand e.g. telephone Numbers
- Efficient filing of important letters and documents
- Getting rid of unwanted paper
- Keeping drawers tidy and labeling containers
- Putting things away after finishing with them
- The handling of bank accounts
- Grouping tasks together e.g. doing all photocopying together
- Seeing every task through, not leaving things half done
- Breaking up large tasks into manageable units
- Care of office equipment, safeguarding and protecting office assets
- Not crumbling under pressure
- Learning to say 'No' pleasantly but assertively when busy
- Improving reading and writing speed and accuracy
- Building confidence

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- Taking one's own time, not panicking and stopping to think
- Maintaining efficient flow of work in the office
- Simplifying work and developing work improvement technique
- The art of handling correspondence, the Five C's (clarity, conciseness, correctness, courtesy, completeness) of good correspondence
- Writing of communication -- essential parts of official/business letters
- Procuring office stationery and forms
- Reception duties (of being polite, helpful, tactful, smart etc.) and the act of handling people
- Handling telephone calls, enquiries and visits of persons

Concluding Remarks

The quality of office management is one of the most important factors that influence organizational success. Management can be successful if the managers' way of thinking and behaving is grounded in positive mental attitude. Even those without a high degree of formal knowledge and information and skills have been successful in reaching a prestigious point of achievement because of their positive attitude. Positive attitude is clearly a must for all kinds of success.

After the introduction of federal democratic republic system to governance in the country, the training institutions have been under tremendous pressure to perform in a new way of thinking, espousing progressive perception to change. At the present time there is a need on the part of those in the public sector training to be change-friendly and devoted to making differences positively in their work for self management and organizational development. Such individuals will be very welcome to the upcoming Institute of Secretariat Training, if it is up indeed.

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