

ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES IN THE EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL POLICIES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION : EXPERIENCE OF THE ISTE

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1. Introduction

The world of today belongs to professionals and specialists. They have undergone systematic training which is necessary to solve a class of problems. These problems and problem-situations are integral parts of our society and of our developmental process. Solutions to such problems are to be obtained from professionals in the field.

Professional societies consist of groups of professionals who have more or less similar background and interests. Every professional society has a Code of Conduct and Ethics for its members which will emphasise the dignity of the profession. The society gives them opportunity to work together for the common good of the profession and ultimately the society. Let us examine how a professional society differs from a commercial organisation or specialist department.

2. Unique Position of a Professional Society.

Professional societies have a unique position in that specialists and experts have associated themselves voluntarily for furtherance of common objectives. Because of this, the professional society is able to call upon from a large reservoir of highly variable and competent expertise which is

not likely to be available even to a large consultancy/commercial organisation or a specialist department. Because of this and more important, because the specialists and experts agree to contribute their time and expertise at little or no cost, many processes of evaluation, expert assessment, monitoring, accreditation etc. are being easily facilitated through the professional societies.

Any person representing an organisation has to necessarily represent the views and interest of the organisation. For example, a government employee representing the government in a forum cannot deviate from the laid policy of the government. However, the same individual called upon to serve as expert under a professional society is free from such constraint because he will be serving the professional society or its committee/group in a private capacity and as such is free to give his objective views on the task in hand.

3. Evolution of National Policies and Their Implementation.

Professional Societies have easy access to large number of their members distributed all over the country. These members are professionals working in various positions, but with a common professional interest. So, whenever a national policy on a particular issue has to

be evolved, it will be quite easy for the Government to seek the assistance of professional bodies which are concerned about the issue. The Professional society can get the issue discussed and proper guidelines evolved at the chapter level, state level and national level through its network of regional centres and local chapters.

In many instances, the initiative to evolve new policies can come from the professional society itself. Whenever there is a lowering in standard in the profession or in the performance of its members, it will be easy for the professional society to sense the same and suggest remedial measures to the concerned authorities.

Another area where a professional society can play a great role is in the implementation of various programmes relating to the profession. Here also accessibility to a large number of experts and institutions are the main strength of the professional society. Generally the experts contribute their time and expertise at no or little cost.

4. Technical and Management Education

The tasks before the technical and management education sector has been well identified and detailed in various documents such as National Policy on Education - 1986 and Programme of Action - 1987. However, it can be mentioned briefly that the improvement and advances in this sector of education will consist of primarily

- (a) curriculum updating including incorporation of technical advances in the professional curriculum;
- (b) updating the competency and skills of the engineering faculty in a rapidly changing technological scene;

- (c) modernising laboratory and instructional methods including removal of absolences, use of multi-media instructional packages;
- (d) providing management inputs at various levels for optimum utilisation of resources.

These tasks require more or less the sustained help, assistance and inputs from highly competent experts and specialists. Professional societies such as the ISTE which has membership of all engineering disciplines and specialisations can, as such, play a unique role in supplying such inputs at very low cost and in the least possible time.

Evaluation of academic environment in an institution is very important in assessing the overall potential and capability of the institution. This can be done effectively only by an outside competent body such as professional society consisting of experts and specialists who will interact with various elements such as students, faculty, administrative staff, alumni, supporting staff, parents, employers, etc.

5. The Indian Scene

In India, we have a larger number of professional societies concerned with engineering and technology. However, most of these engineering societies have been totally ineffective in contributing to the quality and standards in technical education. Most of them seem to be pre-occupied with their membership drives and their own examination systems. A few day-to-day activities are undertaken with no specific long range goal or aim. They have exhibited minimum interest or concern in the field of technical education. When a large number of technical institutions sprung up in the country in the last one decade without proper infrastructure and faculty, the professional societies have not

expressed their views for or against these phenomenon. When the salary scales of engineering teachers were very low compared with those in the industry and field, no professional society put pressure on the Government to revise the pay scale of engineering teachers. When there is continuous erosion of the standard of technical education, these societies have not taken up a single step to rectify it..

6. Role played by the Indian Society for Technical Education

The only exception to the above stated non-involvement of professional societies in contributing to the quality and standards of technical education is the Indian Society for Technical Education (ISTE). ISTE is the only national professional society of engineering teachers and administrators. First started in 1941 as the "Association of Principals of Technical Institutions", it was converted into "Indian Society for Technical Education", in 1967 with a view to enlarge its activities to advance the cause of technological education. Its membership is now open to any person who is actively interested in or concerned with technical education.

Being the only national organisation of educators in the field of engineering and technology, ISTE is being represented in various technical committees and boards formed by the Ministry of HRD and AICTE. They have also been involving the ISTE in many of their important programmes and activities relating to technical education.

ISTE has contributed much in promoting the quality and standards of technical education. It had played an important role in the formulation of the National Policy on Education - 1986, in formulating the AICTE Norms and Standards for Engineering Colleges and Polytechnics, in organising project review meetings for thrust areas in technical

education, in preparing directories on technical personnel and expertise, in arranging conferences and workshops on various topics of importance to technical education, in preparing teacher-manuals for most of the engineering subjects, in preparing and updating model curriculum for various courses and in conducting a variety of continuing education programmes for upgrading the skills and knowledge of engineering teachers and other working professionals.

7. ISTE and AICTE

There is a tremendous task before the AICTE with regard to planning, implementing, monitoring and coordinated development of technical education in the country. AICTE is now quite ill-equipped to perform these tasks satisfactorily. Almost all institutions and State Governments are expressing dis-satisfaction over the performance of the AICTE. even by strengthening the AICTE with additional staff and resources, it is doubtful whether AICTE will be able to improve its performance significantly. It is necessary for the AICTE to get the assistance of professional societies like the ISTE in performing many of the tasks assigned to it. Being a professional society of technical teachers and institutions, ISTE has at its control necessary expertise and organisational capability to carry out many of the tasks assigned to the AICTE.

The following are some areas where the AICTE should make use of the assistance of ISTE in improving its performance :

1. Organising continuing education programmes for engineering teachers using conventional and distance education modes.

2. Preparing model curricula for various courses and keeping it updated from time to time.
3. Providing travel grant to teachers for presenting papers, chairing technical sessions or delivering invited lectures in international and important national conferences and seminars.
4. Providing assistance to teachers and other experts for writing text books, laboratory manuals and monographs.
5. To constitute a National Pool of Eminent Teachers in Engineering especially in selected high technology areas and making the services of these teachers available to various smaller institutions for short periods. This will help transfer of technology and improve the standards of technical education.
6. To help AICTE in the Accreditation of various programmes in technical institutions.
7. To maintain a comprehensive data base of technical education facilities and expertise in the country and keep it updated.
8. To assist in "Technology Watch and Forecasting" and based on this to modify the engineering curriculum and provide training facilities to ensure availability of trained manpower for technologies of the future.
9. To organise conferences, workshops, and working group meeting on behalf of the AICTE.
10. To help in "Technical Education Research" on a continuing basis on specific aspects of technical education such as manpower

needs, training methodologies, socio-economic impact of various programmes etc. and give feed back to AICTE which will help in planning for future.

8. Future Perspective For ISTE

ISTE has completed 24 years of service to the cause of technical education in the country. It has entered the 25th year in 1992. Nearly 60% of all technical institutions and their teachers are now members of the ISTE. ISTE has a national Executive Council of 32 members, 12 State level Sections, 261 Chapters, 640 institutional members, 8400 yearly members and 10,600 life members. It has emerged as a strong representative organisation of technical teachers in the country. It has to play an effective advocacy role for its members and for technical education in the years to come. ISTE has a unique feature. It lies in the fact that a very large number of its members are teachers in the field of technical education. In this way, it is a reservoir of intellectuals. It is really a powerful think-tank. Being composed mainly of teachers, it may be weak in influencing potential decisions, but it can afford to be impartial in its assessment and judgement. It can command a certain degree of respectability. It can influence other engineering societies to make a definite stand and assert their views. It can help in formulating an action plan.

ISTE has prepared a strategic plan for the next few years. The re-defined objectives and strategies are outlined in annexure-1.

ISTE will also be getting assistance from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the next 4 years to strengthen ISTE as a national professional organisation.

It is also hoped that the Ministry of HRD and the AICTE will continue to involve ISTE in all policy making and implementation processes relating to technical education. However, for a professional society to be really effective and strong. It should become financially independent. We hope that during this Silver Jubilee Year, this goal will be achieved through membership drive and donation from well-wishers and supporters.

Annexure-1

Objectives of ISTE

1. To provide support to technical Institutions in the country in effecting the necessary changes in the various policies concerning the different aspects of establishment, development and management of technical institutions.
2. To assist Technical Institutions in the development of their faculty and staff by way of coordinating and organising staff development programmes both in the offerings, prectiacle training, exchange of personnel, etc.
3. To collect information on all aspects relating to technical education including manpower needs and transfer the same to institutions, members and other agencies for their use.
4. To provide expert services to technical institutions relating to project formulation, establishment of new institutions, indtroducing new programmes, planning infrastructural facilities, accreditation of programmes/institution etc.
5. To act as a catalytic agent in the development of the institutions own capabilities and potentialities in

respect of curriculum, semester schedules, examination reforms etc. through supportive actives for self development.

Strategies for meeting objectives

1. (i) study teams /seminars workshops
(ii) Working Groups/Teak Group on specific issues
(iii) Intervention; example: dialogue with Govrnment by ISTE
2. (i) Identify and organise staff development programmes for faculty and support staff based on the assessment of the common needs of Technical Instituions.
(ii) Facilitate technical institutions in the planning and implementation of their staff development programmes.
(iii) Strive to introduce new programmes for faculty development;
(iv) Strive to promote case studies/action research in the area of teaching and learning.
3. (i) Formation of a Cell specifically for the purpose of collecting and transferring information on all aspects related to technical education through establishing linkages with various organisations.
(ii) Periodic publication of the information collected to members and institutions.
(iii) Facilitate analysis of information collected.

4. (i) Assist in the documentation of case studies on institutional development taking the assistance of collaborative agencies .

(ii) Provide consultancy services to technical institutions in matters such as project formulation, establishing new institutions, introducing new programmes, planning infrastructural facilities, accreditation of programmes/institution etc.

(iii) Provide assistance to AICTE, Government of India and State Governments in the formulation and implementation of programmes relating to technical

education.

5. (i) Bring out publications relating to curriculum of courses, examination systems, strategies for staff development etc.

(ii) Form study groups to provide assistance to institutions in the self developmental programmes.

(iii) Provide assistance to technical institutions in the area of Accreditation/Evaluation.

(iv) Organise workshops and seminars at Institution/State/National levels for discussing problems of interest to technical institutions.

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