DEBATES ON ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN INDIA

EXPERTISE

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The **State Capacity Initiative** at the Centre for Policy Research is an interdisciplinary research and practice programme focused on addressing the challenges of the 21st-century Indian state. The purpose of this initiative is to place the critical challenges of building state capacity at the heart of the field of policy research in India, where it has always belonged but remains surprisingly marginalised. We therefore start with first principles and ground ourselves in existing realities to deepen and expand the understanding of the challenges and possibilities of building state capacity in a democratic and federal India. Our programme of work focuses on the changing roles of the Indian state: institutional design, implementation and administrative capacity; the challenges of regulatory and fiscal capacity; and the complex and changing relations between society, politics and state capacity in India.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"No knowledge is superfluous to a man who may be eventually entrusted with the charge of the interest of a people or the rights and powers of a Government. It is not required that he should be deeply versed in every branch of science, neither is this within the compass of human capacity. But it is in the power of every man of common talents by willingly and early application to possess a competent share of all: that is, such a portion of each as shall qualify him, if not to reason and discourse upon it, to understand those that do; in a word, to be in all what is contemptuously called a smatterer" (Hutton, 1929, p. 635).

This is an extract from a letter written by Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of Bengal from 1732-1818, expressing his opinions on the need for establishing a training college for the East India Company's Civil servants, as voiced by his successor, Marquess Wellesley. The quote encapsulates Hastings's vision of the expertise that was required of the colonial civil servants. Hastings begins by claiming that civil servants need to possess knowledge on a wide range of disciplines, however, recognising that this exceeds human capacity, he recommends that they should have a rudimentary understanding of varied subjects, enough to engage with experts in each area.

Hastings's imagination of the civil servant is representative of the larger colonial regime. Historians have noted that "the British in India, as with their contemporary civil service, worked with a generalist notion of a civil servant: a man broadly educated and able on the basis of background, general knowledge and manly virtues to carry out manifold duties" (Cohn, 1987, p. 544). The generalist training of civil servants

was meant to help them execute the myriad duties they performed, as judges, revenue officers, political officers and administrative officers.

Historical accounts show that the education and training of the colonial civil servant was purposely made non-specialised. Autobiographical narratives of ICS officers who received their training at Halieybury (England), reveal that the quality of education was low and students were tested on their knowledge of languages such as Persian and Sanskrit, which had little practical use once they arrived in India. After the Service was made merit-based in 1853, officer training included more practical aspects such as attending court proceedings and writing reports, however, it did not involve in-depth specialisation in any one field.

The non-specialised character of training and the expertise gained, were well suited to the nature of the polity that required district officials to hold multiple portfolios. Earl Cornwallis, the third Governor General of Bengal who is credited with making extensive changes in the civil service from 1793 to 1859, tried to differentiate the judicial and supervisory functions for land revenue assessment and collection. He created the office of the District Collector as a supervisory role to oversee collection of revenue from landholders, whereas the administration of law was to be the responsibility of a civil judge and magistrate. However, after the annexation of Awadh and the territorial expansion of the company, it proved impossible for a District Collector to separate their judicial and supervisory functions, particularly in the newly acquired territories (Cohn, 1987, p. 509).

The Indian Administrative Service (IAS) we have today inherited this generalist notion of the civil servant from its predecessor, the ICS. Post-independence, even though different services were created to undertake specific responsibilities, the imagination of the expertise of the IAS officer continues to be organised around the principles of the colonial civil service. This has led many to argue that the skills and knowledge of the IAS were unsuited to the nature of polity and demands of governance (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969).

More than fifty years later, the same tension concerning the personnel involved in governance and the skills/knowledge required for these roles persists. As a result, two fundamental questions are central to the debates on expertise in the country's government. First: What kind of knowledge and expertise is most useful for administrators? This debate has frequently been framed as a choice between generalists and specialists. And second: How can this expertise be embedded in administration, particularly at senior levels? Two kinds of solutions dominate this discourse, one where internal mechanisms are restructured to make best use of existing internal talent (via domain assignment) and the other involving the recruitment of external experts (via lateral entry).

This working paper delves into the detailed discussion on these two questions by reviewing the First and Second Administrative Reforms Commissions (ARC), Central Pay Commission Reports, the Surinder Nath Committee report, Sarkaria Commission report, NITI Three Year Action Agenda and Parliamentary Standing Committee reports. The first section of the working paper attempts to present a discursive overview of the generalist-specialist binary. The next two sections, on Domain Assignment and Lateral Entry respectively, explain the dominant approaches that have been considered to address the expertise problem.

2. GENERALISTS VS SPECIALISTS: ORIGINS AND TENSIONS

As with any job, there is consensus within the reform discourse that bureaucrats must display a high degree of ability and expertise. However, there are opposing views on what constitutes this expertise at the highest levels of the bureaucracy. These differences have frequently been expressed in the language of 'generalists' and 'specialists' partially as a result of the structure of India's Civil Service which consists of generalist and specialist services as described in the next sub-section. The next two subsections throw light on the evolution of reform thinking on the kind of expertise needed—from narrow technical knowledge to domain competence, and eventually towards a more complex understanding that expertise is gained on the job that cannot be achieved through appropriate training alone. In the timeline on page 6, we present the sequence of events and reports of the last few decades that we consider salient for understanding the debate on generalist versus specialist roles. The timeline offers a bird's eye view of reform trajectory when read alongside the detailed information provided in the following sections.

Why prioritise specialist knowledge?

The First ARC in 1969 was one of the earliest to deliberate expertise requirements in the Indian government. In doing so, the Commission divided positions in government into the following categories based on knowledge requirements: general administration, specialised administration, and technical and/or scientific administration. The positions of District Collector, Income Tax Officer and Executive Engineer respectively illustrate the role played by each category.

The First ARC emphasised that the post-independence change in the nature of governance necessitated a shift in the personnel system. Before Independence, the government was concerned primarily with the "enforcement of law, the maintenance of order and the collection of revenue" , for which the ICS system worked well (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969, p. 4). In the post-Independence period, particularly with the adoption of planning as a developmental strategy, administration became "more and more specialised, technical and scientific" (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969, p. 5). The Commission noted that the administration was also required to take charge of new domains like social and economic development in addition to unfamiliar spheres like defence, finance and foreign affairs which were, until then outside its purview. More importantly, the Commission believed that the core objective of the government had seen a fundamental shift—from regulation and maintenance of activities to the formulation and implementation

of policies and programmes for social and individual welfare — that called for different capabilities. Despite the greater need for officers with specialised, technical, and scientific capabilities, there continued to be "too great a reliance on the generalist," especially in higher administrative positions directly involved in policy and managerial decisions (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969, p. 6).

The First ARC believed that the required subject matter competencies no longer suited "a broad genus like that of the professional civil servant," rather they could only be "imbibed through special training grafted on to a basic functional skill or academic qualification" (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969, p. 9). In keeping with this principle, the Commission suggested that when a position called for specific academic credentials or specialised experience, the staffing system should draw from the concerned technical or specialised services for filling even the most senior positions. In other cases where these credentials were not essential and the skills needed could be learnt through training and experience, it recommended that the staffing system should select the best from both generalist and specialist cadres (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969).

From technical knowledge to domain competence

Four decades after the First ARC made these recommendations, the Second ARC once again grappled with the same problem of expertise. A close reading of the Second ARC reveals small but significant differences in their understanding of the kind of expertise required. The Second ARC stressed the need for domain competence, or in-depth knowledge of the sector, which was distinguished from specialised technical knowledge emphasised in the First ARC. It viewed domain competence as a broad understanding of the concerned sector and managerial abilities born out of extended field experience within domains. Based on its survey of the higher administration in other countries, the Second ARC concluded that "at senior management levels, conceptual clarity combined with leadership and decision making ability as well as a broad vision
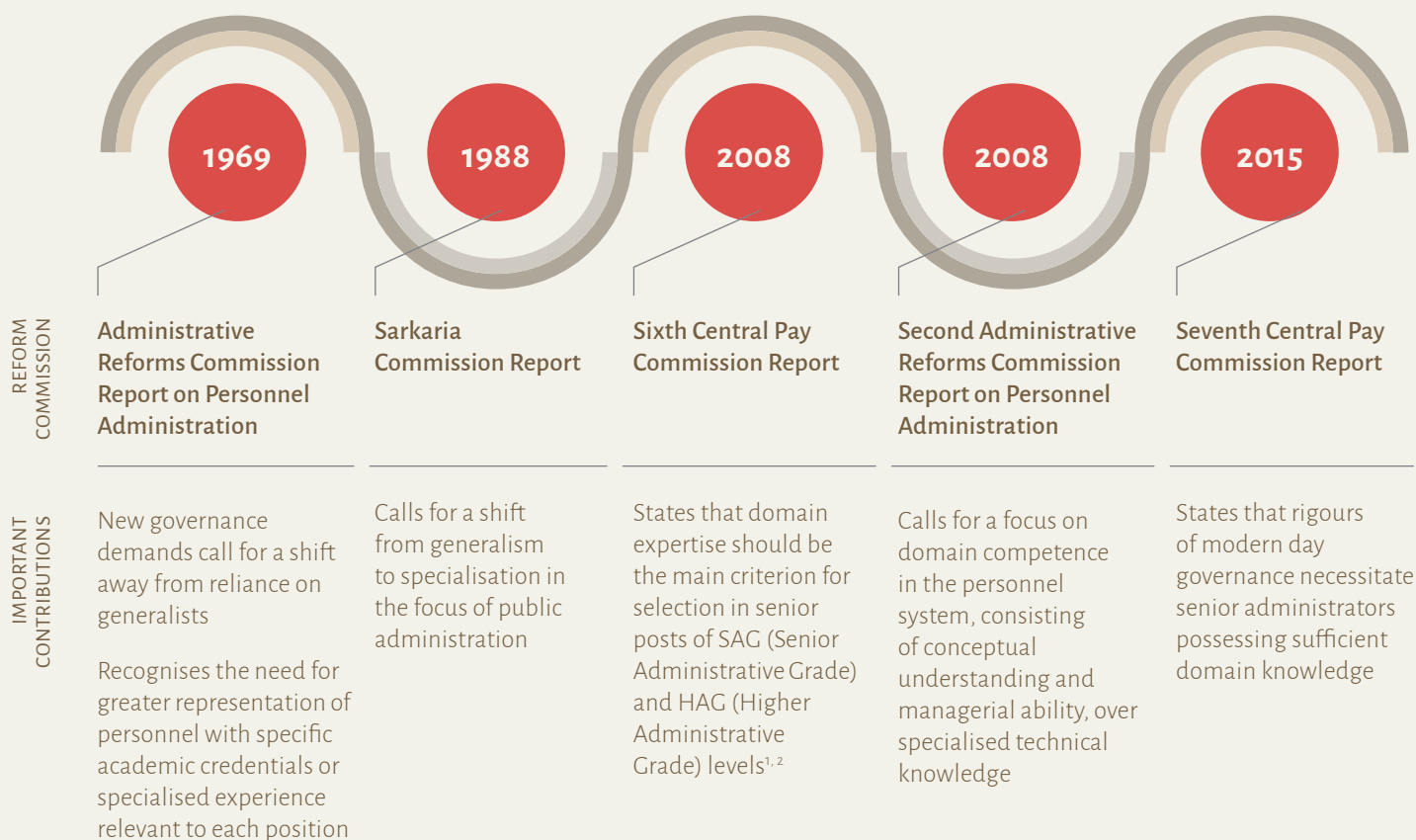
Who is an expert?

The shift in the definition of expertise between the First and Second ARCs is critical to our understanding of a more fundamental concept—how do people learn and become experts? On the one hand, early conceptualisations of expertise seem to emphasise formal college education and technical training. The Second ARC, however, shifted the focus of expertise to knowledge gained through field experience within domains and considers even generalist qualities like leadership to be a consequence of this experience.

The Seventh Central Pay Commission was particularly illuminating on the complexities of this debate. The Pay Commission suggested that the existing system of generalists occupying senior policymaking positions is outmoded and inimical to effective policy making, shifting as they do from one field to another in short spans of time. CPC members, however, expressed disagreement on the practical application of such ideals to the existing system. For instance, CPC member Vivek Rae contended that the broad spectrum experience of the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) actually equipped them to occupy positions across different domains of senior administration. He argued that the unique career progression within this system was in itself an essential form of specialisation and that the domain knowledge, though relevant, was less important than managerial skills at the policymaking level (Government of India, 2015).

In sum, bureaucrats can gain different kinds of knowledge and capabilities through a number of avenues—education, the allotment to specific cadres, experience gained in a domain area and experience in managing complex and political processes of governance. Having said that, the reform reports have been unable to provide a clear direction on the kind of knowledge and expertise that is most useful to administrators and policymakers. In the absence of such consensus, discussions on how to enhance expertise within the bureaucracy continue to equate technical or domain knowledge with expertise. The two most dominant solutions to the expertise problem—domain assignment and lateral entry—are discussed next.

Figure 1 A timeline of debates on generalists and specialists

REFORM COMMISSION	Administrative Reforms Commission Report on Personnel Administration	Sarkaria Commission Report	Sixth Central Pay Commission Report	Second Administrative Reforms Commission Report on Personnel Administration	Seventh Central Pay Commission Report
1969	**1988**	**2008**	**2008**	**2015**	

| IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS | New governance demands call for a shift away from reliance on generalists

Recognises the need for greater representation of personnel with specific academic credentials or specialised experience relevant to each position | Calls for a shift from generalism to specialisation in the focus of public administration | States that domain expertise should be the main criterion for selection in senior posts of SAG (Senior Administrative Grade) and HAG (Higher Administrative Grade) levels[1, 2] | Calls for a focus on domain competence in the personnel system, consisting of conceptual understanding and managerial ability, over specialised technical knowledge | States that rigours of modern day governance necessitate senior administrators possessing sufficient domain knowledge |

3. DOMAIN ASSIGNMENT

Domain assignment is the process of assigning a civil servant to a specific domain or sector (financial management/ economic development/ defence administration and internal security) within the administration, based on an assessment of their skills and competence.

Reform reports have consistently argued for domain assignment as a means to solve the expertise problem in higher administration (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969; Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008; Surinder Nath Committee, 2003). The process of assigning and matching officers to domains develops expertise in two ways. First, it id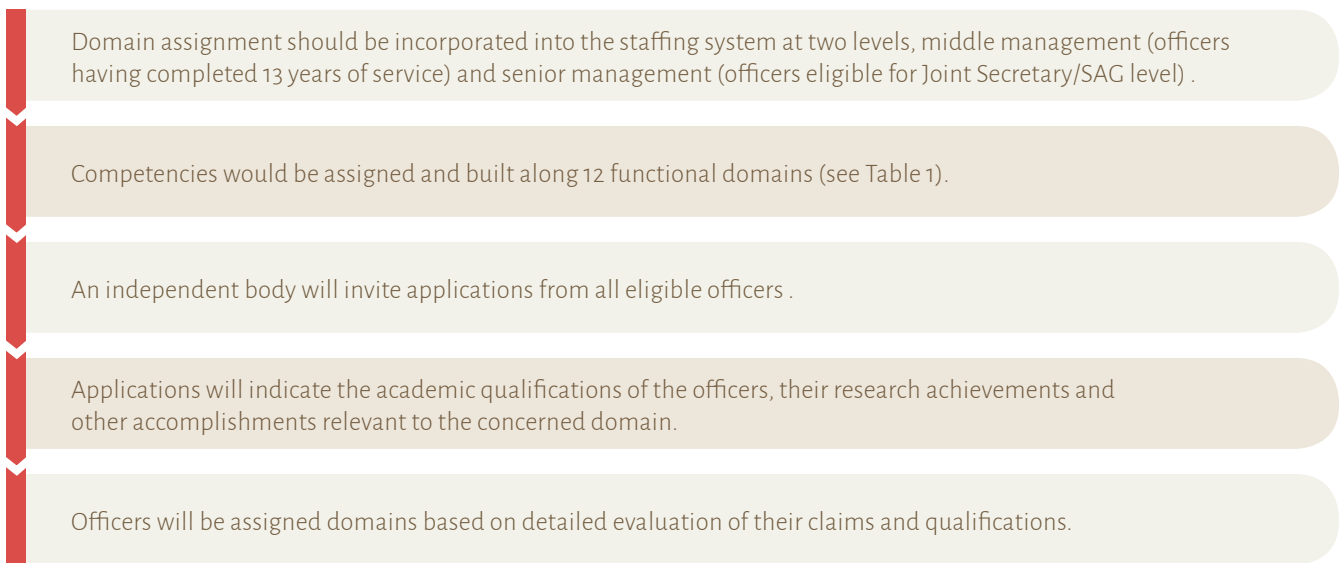entifies officers whose areas of interest and specialisation match the job definition, and second, by restricting officers to positions within certain sectors, it allows them to build expertise and competence in those sectors.

There is strong consensus in reform literature on the need for domain assignment, but the logic of how to facilitate that process has evolved over time. This section begins by laying out the different ways in which domain-based selection processes have been conceptualised and then highlights the evolution of reform thinking on the topic. Finally, it situates reform conversations on domain assignment within the broader administrative reform agenda.

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[1] 2013 MOSPI circular: http://www.mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/civil-list-2013/iss_civil_list_2013_abbrevn.pdf

[2] 2019 DoPT circular: https://documents.doptcirculars.nic.in/D2/D02eod/2nd%20tranchebKKkf.PDF

Figure 2 The Second ARC's proposal to incorporate domain assignment in selection processes

Domain assignment should be incorporated into the staffing system at two levels, middle management (officers having completed 13 years of service) and senior management (officers eligible for Joint Secretary/SAG level) .

Competencies would be assigned and built along 12 functional domains (see Table 1).

An independent body will invite applications from all eligible officers .

Applications will indicate the academic qualifications of the officers, their research achievements and other accomplishments relevant to the concerned domain.

Officers will be assigned domains based on detailed evaluation of their claims and qualifications.

Two key debates: defining domains and when specialisation matters

As shown in Figure 2, reform recommendations pertaining to domain assignment are usually in the form of large scale schemes proposing a complete overhaul of internal selection systems. To understand the evolution of reform thinking on the topic, it is useful to disaggregate these proposals and examine their views on individual aspects that constitute domain assignment.

Reports such as the First ARC and the Surinder Nath Committee listed the domains into which officers should be assigned, without articulating the reasons for choosing those specific domains. The Second ARC recognised that there was a "considerable confusion about the concept of domain competence" arguing that previous reports had linked domains to Ministries instead of functions (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008, p. 180). Since each Ministry had a specific core function (Railways or Health) as well as many additional functions (personnel management, finance, administration), it was important to think about domain competence in terms of functions. Interestingly however, the 12 domains chosen by the Second ARC (see Table 1) also appear to correspond more closely to Ministries than to functions, essentially

showcasing how challenging it is to make clear distinctions in structuring domain assignments.

Another significant thread in reform conversations relates to the level at which domains are assigned. While the final goal of most domain assignment proposals was to increase subject matter knowledge in senior management, both ARCs and later, the NITI Aayog, emphasised the need to begin the expertise-building process early on in officers' careers (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969; NITI Aayog, 2017; Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008). The First ARC, for instance, stipulated domain-based selection at both middle (Deputy Secretary) and senior management (Joint Secretary) levels, for which officers with 8-12 years and 17 years of experience respectively would be eligible (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969). The Second ARC recommended that all officers completing 13 years of service should be assigned to domains, reasoning that "when the officer is eligible to be at the level of Joint Secretary, he/she would have had at least three to four years exposure to a domain" (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008, p. 181). These reform contributions recognised that building domain knowledge and expertise within the system would have to be a complex multi-layered process rather than a one-time fix.

TABLE 1: Age limit and number of attempts for examination from 1960 to 2020

Theme	First ARC	Surinder Nath Committee	Second ARC
Proposed strategy for domain assignment	Officers with specialist knowledge and training should be better represented in senior roles. This could be achieved by reserving "functional posts" for corresponding functional services while "posts outside functional areas" were to be opened up to suitable officers from any service through a transparent domain assignment process	Officers should be allotted to positions based on their domain competence—subject matter expertise from work experience, academic background, training or research	Domains should refer to functions not ministries since each ministry could have multiple functions under it
Posts included in Domain Assignment Process	Only "posts outside functional areas" should be filled through domain-based selection. Other "functional posts" would be allotted to functional services	All posts should be open for selection of the most suitable candidate during domain-based selection	All posts should be open for selection of the most suitable candidate during domain-based selection
Domains identified	1. Economic Administration 2. Industrial Administration 3. Agricultural and Rural Development Administration 4. Social and Educational Administration 5. Personnel Administration 6. Financial Administration 7. Defence Administration and Internal Security 8. Planning	11 Ministry-specific domains: 1. Agriculture and Rural Development 2. Social Sectors (Education, Health, Tribal Development etc) 3. Culture and Information 4. Natural Resource Management including Environment 5. Energy and Environment 6. Communication Systems and Connectivity Infrastructure 7. Public Finance and Financial Management 8. Industry and Trade 9. Domestic Affairs and Defence 10. Housing and Urban Affairs 11. Personnel and General Administration, Governance Reform and Regulatory systems	1. General Administration 2. Urban Development 3. Security 4. Rural Development 5. Financial Management 6. Infrastructure 7. HRD Social Empowerment 8. Economic Administration 9. Tax Administration 10. Agriculture Development 11. Natural Resources 12. Health Management

Theme	First ARC	Surinder Nath Committee	Second ARC
Level at which domains are assigned	1. At Deputy Secretary level for officers with 8-12 years of service (middle management) 2. At Joint Secretary level for officers with 17 years of service (senior management)	At Empanelment for senior levels like Joint Secretary and Additional Secretary (senior management)[3] (the mandate of the Committee was limited to reviewing the empanelment process)	1. At Director level for officers completing 13 years of service (middle management) 2. At Joint Secretary level (senior management)
Process of domain ssignment	Applicants would be required to undergo a written mid-career examination, an interview, and an assessment of previous work, all conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)	Applicants for empanelment should be required to submit a write-up to the Empanelment Committee, summarising their qualifications for the domains they favoured Selection process should be managed by the UPSC and officers will be allotted a maximum of 3 domains	Applications would be invited from all eligible officers. An independent body, the Central Civil Services Authority, should be in charge of the process and assign domains to officers based on academic background, research accomplishments and domain-related achievements

Selecting the best officer: from functional fit to open competition

The First ARC in 1969 argued that the expertise problem of the time was that officers with specialist and technical knowledge were not given an adequate share of senior roles. It sought to resolve this by reserving certain positions for functional services (like the IRS and IIS), and having an open selection for the remaining posts that would choose officers on the basis of their suitability to each post (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969). This importance given to subject matter experience in the reform discourse gradually shifted, with later reports instituting open competition among all services for all middle and senior management positions without any special preference for functional services.

The domain assignment system proposed by the First ARC emphasized the distinction between "functional posts" and "posts outside functional areas" (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969). The former category included posts under functions like income tax, mechanical engineering and land

revenue that required an "intimate knowledge of the particular function concerned" (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969, p. 17). The First ARC suggested that these "functional posts" must be filled by officers from the concerned functional service at both the field office and Secretariat levels. The logic behind this suggestion was that subject matter expertise would remain vital even though the managerial responsibilities of positions in these areas would steadily increase at higher levels. On the other hand, "posts outside functional areas" were to be filled by the most suitable officers across all services, functional and non-functional. For this purpose, posts were divided into 8 "specialisms".[4] Posts under these specialisms would focus more on policy and management than functional posts at the same level. By earmarking positions for functional services, the First ARC clearly perceived the subject matter knowledge of functional services to be of more value than the unique experience of generalist cadres.

The Commission also highlighted the importance of special training to prepare officers for their domain-related roles. It mandated the training include: training in headquarters work[5], special courses in each of the

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[3] The Sixth CPC (2008) also recommended that domains should be assigned at senior management levels like the Senior Administrative Grade (usually Joint Secretary posts) and Higher Administrative Grade (usually Additional Secretary posts)

[4] The First Administrative Reforms Commission referred to areas of specialisation as "specialisms". The specialisms have been listed in Table 1

[5] According to the First ARC, training in headquarters work would involve broad foundational courses in management concepts, economic concepts, policy making, government machinery, and relations with different stakeholders.

specialisms, and training in the sub-areas within each specialism (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969). This training in specialisms was aimed at developing a "deep and intimate knowledge of the theoretical concepts, techniques, systems and procedures connected with the specialism" (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969, p. 73).

Though a number of reform reports in the 2000s (the Surinder Nath Committee, Sixth CPC, and Second ARC) sought to address expertise gaps through efficient allocation of domains, they did not attach the same premium to functional and specialist knowledge as the First ARC. Reform reports from this period have largely suggested that all posts should be open for selection of the most suitable candidate during domain assignment. The Surinder Nath Committee (2003) and the Sixth CPC (2008) put forward a scheme to prioritise domain expertise in the selection to SAG and HAG positions, where posts would be open to all eligible officers of AIS and Group "A" Services (Government of India, 2008; Surinder Nath Committee, 2003). The Second ARC also favoured keeping domain assignment open to all services to select the most functionally suitable candidates (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008).

Domain Assignment as part of a larger reform agenda

We have seen that domain assignment was primarily thought of as a measure to enhance expertise and specialist knowledge in senior government roles. Reform reports have also viewed domain-based selection as part of a larger reform agenda to address concerns regarding transparency, credibility and fairness in the existing system of staffing senior positions.

The Indian government is staffed by a number of organised services—generalist services like the IAS and functional services like the IPS and IRS. Most of the organised services that vie for limited senior roles in administration are selected through the same qualifying examination (the Civil Services Examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission), differing only in the ranks obtained in the exam. Officers of different organised services, therefore, expect similar treatment and equitable career progression. Reform reports, however, have repeatedly observed that a disproportionate share of senior administrative positions are held by the IAS, resulting in tensions between the IAS

and other services regarding parity in representation at senior levels (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969; Government of India, 2008, 2015). These remarks by the Chairman of the Seventh CPC convey the seriousness of this issue and showcase the link between inter-service parity and the problem of expertise in government:

> All posts covering majority of domains are today manned by IAS, be it a technical or administrative which is the main cause of grievance. It is time that government take a call that subject domain should be the criteria to man the posts and not a generalist. If fair and equitable treatment is not given to all Services, then the gap between IAS and other services will widen and it may lead to a chaotic situation and it will not be good for the governance and country (Government of India, 2015, p. 185).

These grievances regarding the fairness of the selection process arose from concerns regarding transparency in its implementation. The Second ARC admitted that some concerns had been raised about the transparency and objectivity of the selection process and the resulting possibility that "positions do not get assigned to officers who are most suited for the post" (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008, p. 175). The Sixth CPC also elaborated on these grievances surrounding the selection process, stating that:

> The Commission is fully aware that in theory these posts are already open to all AIS (All India Services) as well as Central Group A Services. However, in practice, the selection procedure for these posts has been made so non-transparent that the credibility of the entire selection procedure is now being questioned. The pressing need is to ensure a selection process that is open, transparent and gives equitable chance to all the eligible officers (Government of India, 2008, p. 356.)

It is against this background that reform reports such as the CPCs presented domain assignment as part of a larger revamp of the current selection process that will establish a credible and fair method to select officers best suited for each post. For instance, the emphasis on having an independent body such as the UPSC or the proposed Central Civil Service Authority to spearhead the process is expected to address concerns about credibility.

Domain assignment, therefore, seeks to address two key parts of the administrative reform agenda—solving the expertise problem and moving towards a more credible and fair selection process. However, it has

seen limited implementation till date. As recently as 2017, the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice noted that "officers are not empanelled domain-wise" and domain assignment is "yet to be accepted and implemented" (Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, 2017, p. 12). Similarly, the 2020 report of the same Parliamentary Standing Committee once again suggested that ministries should be grouped into clusters or sectors, and officers should be assigned to a particular sector for the entirety of their careers, indicating that little progress has been made in this direction thus far (Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice).

4. LATERAL ENTRY

Lateral entry is the process by which professionals from outside the Civil Services are inducted into senior positions in the bureaucracy. The lateral entry process aims to bring in fresh talent and specialised expertise into governance through competitive processes (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008; NITI Aayog, 2017). It offsets costs associated with in-house training and the search for officers with appropriate domain expertise. However, lateral entry has been difficult to implement due to the lack of institutionalisation of the process of selection and retention of lateral entrants. To understand lateral entry, we begin by first discussing the more fundamental and global debate on the structure of the higher civil services and then chart the specific history of lateral entry in the Indian context.

The broader debate: career and post-based systems

The Second ARC located the discussion on the forms of expertise in higher administration within a broader debate about the structure of the Senior Executive Structure (SES) in the country. The SES is a pool of select civil servants from which officers are selected to high level leadership roles in the government. Understanding the two forms of SES, differentiated by their degree of openness, is key to how we perceive the expertise problem in governance and is especially relevant to unpacking the lateral entry debate.

India has a career-based SES which recruits civil servants at the entry level through examinations or promotion from feeder cadres, a process also followed in France, Japan and Korea. These early career officers undergo elite training and are put on the fast track to occupy key government roles. This is a closed system where appointments to top civil servant positions are made only from within this select group. At the other end of the spectrum is the position-based system followed by countries like the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the USA (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008). Here, personnel are selected to senior positions from a much wider pool encompassing all eligible civil servants and applicants from the private and non-profit sectors with the required skills. It is important to note that even in position-based systems, only a small percentage of the appointments are made in this open manner. The Second ARC emphasised that these systems are not watertight, and countries tend to borrow from and mix with other systems to suit their needs.

The Second ARC also laid out the strengths and weaknesses of each system. As a result of its closed nature, the career-based system fosters a common culture and value system, and possesses strong channels of internal communication. On the other hand, reduced competition for posts tends to discourage initiative and breed complacency. The Second ARC noted that this weakness has been evident in the Indian context where the assurance of career progression, reliance on seniority, frequent transfers, poor reporting systems and low competition have combined to discourage initiative and prevent the entry of new ideas. The counter to this is that position-based systems cannot replicate the strengths of the existing one—widespread field experience providing exposure to the complex socio-political context and the ability to link policy making and policy implementation in India's unique federal system. There are many other potential disadvantages such as the lack of suitable talent in the private and non-profit sectors, possible dilution of affirmative action, issue of conflict of interest while hiring from the private sector, and demoralisation of internal talent (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008).

Based on this assessment of alternative SES systems, the Second ARC recommended the incorporation of some features from position-based models. The Commission proposed increasing competition in

the senior management pool, by opening it up to all existing Services and to private sector candidates who can bring necessary skills into the system (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008). However, initial articulations of lateral entry were more limited in scope, as we discuss next.

The changing rationale for lateral entry: from inducting specific expertise to enhancing competition

Lateral entry in India has always been suggested with the goal of inducting specialist knowledge into the government. Over the decades however, other motives unrelated to expertise have become part of the lateral entry reform discourse.

Consistent with its clear stance on the importance of specialist knowledge, the First ARC recommended lateral entry to senior posts in technical and specialist roles (Administrative Reforms Commission, 1969). It suggested that these personnel could be sourced from universities, industrial and commercial fields, and from the armed forces. Simultaneously, the First ARC also expressed strong concerns that this form of appointment could demoralise the serving personnel enough to outweigh its benefits. Therefore, the Commission insisted that lateral entry be implemented only in cases where entrants were expected to bring in skills absent in the existing pool.

Unlike the First ARC's focus on inducting skills not available in the government, the Fifth and Sixth CPCs and the Second ARC suggested a different rationale for lateral entry—increased competition and improving government work culture. When lateral entry was eventually operationalised in 2018 and 2019, it was presented as a remedy for the vacancy problem in the middle and senior administration.

The Fifth and Sixth CPCs advocated for short-term contractual employment as a means to fill senior posts requiring expert knowledge (Government of India, 1997, 2008). The Fifth CPC sought to promote this kind of contractual employment to engineer a shift in how the government thought about employment—from focussing excessively on providing employment security to "ensuring that the work of the Government is done at the minimum possible cost" (Government of India, 1997, p. 173). It also hinted that external recruits would bring innovation and fresh thinking into the government. The Sixth CPC reiterated the need for such contractual

appointments to posts in senior positions requiring technical or scientific skills. It added that external talent should be brought in through performance contracts and that these positions should have salaries comparable to the private sector without permanent tenure (Government of India, 2008). The CPCs therefore expected the lateral entry reform to allow for the induction of fresh talent with less regulatory burdens and eventually foster a better work culture.

Similar to its recommendation to open up senior management to all services, the Second ARC's objective behind suggesting lateral entry was to "introduce an element of competition in appointments to the top posts" by combining career-based and position-based systems (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008, p. 207).

In 2018 and 2019 respectively, the DoPT decided to recruit lateral entrants at Joint Secretary level (10 positions) and Deputy Secretary/Director level (40 positions). Official communication about this change revealed that it was expected to fulfil the "twin objectives of bringing in fresh talent as well as augmenting the availability of manpower" in these roles (Lok Sabha, 2019). In sum, though originally viewed as a solution to the expertise problem, lateral entry has over time been suggested a panacea to the various problems of public sector employment such as the lack of competition, shortage of human resources and poor work culture.

Enabling lateral entrants to work effectively

Debates on lateral entry within the public discourse have primarily focused on the 'why' dimension of lateral entry. This debate is confined to understanding the need for expertise and innovation in the bureaucracy. It has largely neglected 'how' lateral entry is done both in discourse as well as implementation. The Second ARC offers critical guidance on the matter by emphasizing the need to move towards a robust and institutionalized process for lateral entry (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008).

While acknowledging the need to bring specialist skills into the government, the Second ARC expressed concern over the manner in which this had been done previously. The Commission posited that "lateral entry as done in the past on an ad hoc basis can hardly be considered a suitable model of manpower planning since the present incumbents in government departments tend
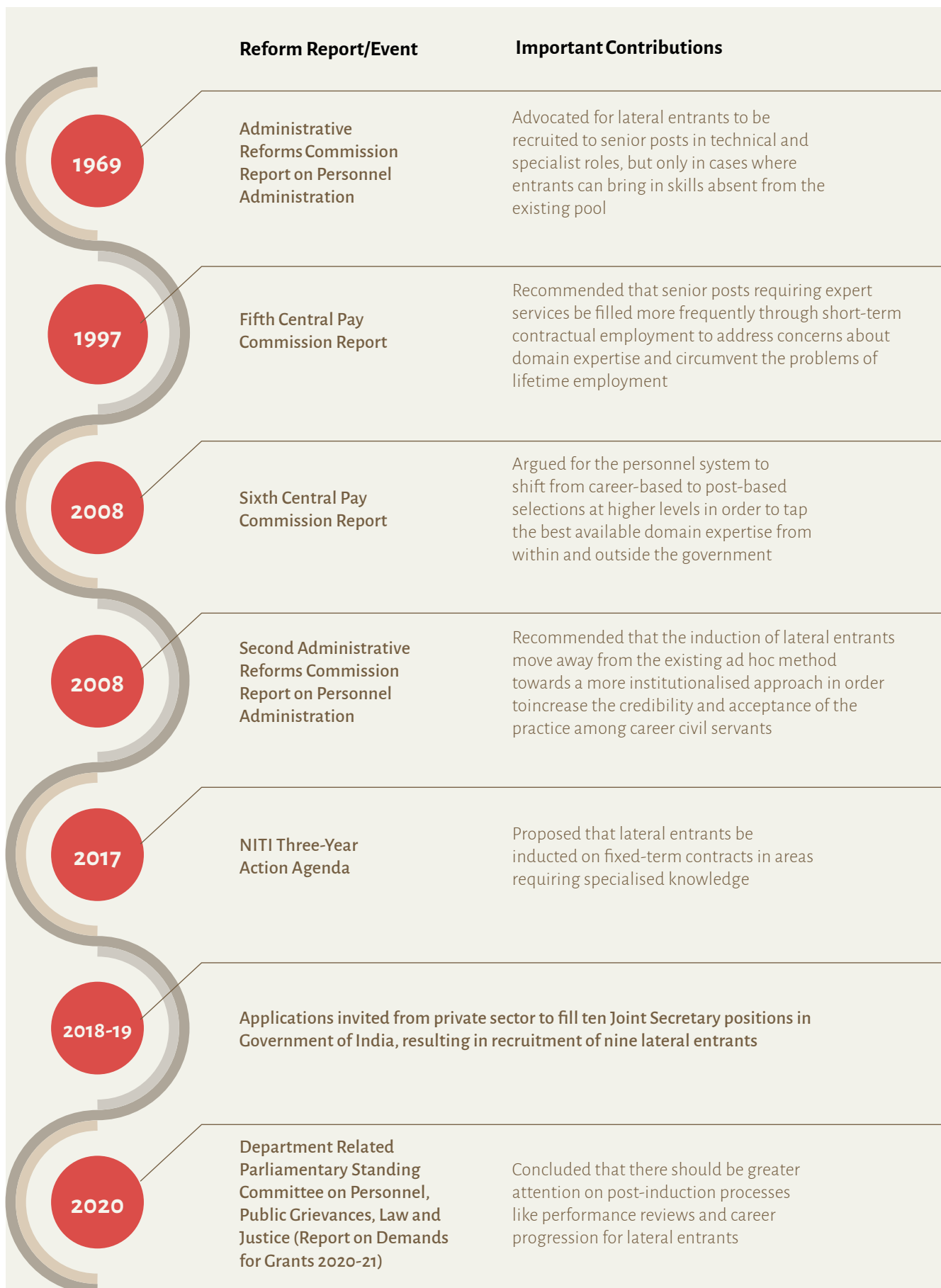
to resist entry of outside talent and the whole process remains personality driven and inchoate " (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008, p. 208). It proposed a more institutionalised process for the induction of lateral entrants in the hope that it would provide the legitimacy needed to integrate lateral entrants into the existing system. The first step towards institutionalisation was to decide the level at which lateral entry would happen. The Second ARC argued that the Additional Secretary or HAG was ideal, as it involved more leadership than operational functions. Additionally, the Second ARC also proposed that an independent Central Civil Services Authority would lead the earmarking of positions, invitation of applications (from outside talent as well as serving officers) and selection interviews (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2008).

June 2018 saw a significant step in the lateral entry debate with the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) calling for applications from external candidates for ten Joint Secretary posts. These positions were filled in 2019, with a government notification announcing 40 additional positions at Deputy Secretary or the Director level, to be filled in the same manner (Rajya Sabha, 2019). Tensions and criticism over the integrity and transparency of this intake are strongly linked to questions of institutionalising lateral entry. By deciding to recruit experts to Joint Secretary (SAG) and Deputy Secretary/Director (Selection Grade) levels, the government made a clear shift away from recommendations for recruiting lateral entrants solely for the senior-most positions.

Though the UPSC was responsible for the actual selection, critical aspects of the process such as identifying positions based on assessing needs and delineating selection criteria appear to have been managed by the DoPT (Government of India, 2018; Rajya Sabha, 2019). Further, the DoPT's eligibility criterion that applicants need to be "working at comparable levels in private sector companies" (Department of Personnel and Training, 2018) was criticised for being ambiguous given the difference in roles, titles and responsibilities between the private and public sectors (Shetty, 2018). Finally, given the extreme competition and number of hurdles that IAS officers face en route to a Joint Secretary position, the intake of lateral entrants through only personal interviews was viewed as having a demoralizing effect on career bureaucrats (Shetty, 2018).

Most recently, the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2020) expanded the discourse around lateral entry towards post-induction processes by calling for regular performance reviews and retention of high performing appointees (Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, 2020). This suggestion emphasised that lateral entry would have to be accompanied by rigorous evaluation, support and incentivisation systems in order to be effective.

Figure 3 A timeline of debates on lateral entry

	Reform Report/Event	Important Contributions
1969	Administrative Reforms Commission Report on Personnel Administration	Advocated for lateral entrants to be recruited to senior posts in technical and specialist roles, but only in cases where entrants can bring in skills absent from the existing pool
1997	Fifth Central Pay Commission Report	Recommended that senior posts requiring expert services be filled more frequently through short-term contractual employment to address concerns about domain expertise and circumvent the problems of lifetime employment
2008	Sixth Central Pay Commission Report	Argued for the personnel system to shift from career-based to post-based selections at higher levels in order to tap the best available domain expertise from within and outside the government
2008	Second Administrative Reforms Commission Report on Personnel Administration	Recommended that the induction of lateral entrants move away from the existing ad hoc method towards a more institutionalised approach in order toincrease the credibility and acceptance of the practice among career civil servants
2017	NITI Three-Year Action Agenda	Proposed that lateral entrants be inducted on fixed-term contracts in areas requiring specialised knowledge
2018-19	Applications invited from private sector to fill ten Joint Secretary positions in Government of India, resulting in recruitment of nine lateral entrants	
2020	Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (Report on Demands for Grants 2020-21)	Concluded that there should be greater attention on post-induction processes like performance reviews and career progression for lateral entrants

5. DISCUSSION

We return to the two questions that motivated this working paper: what kind of knowledge and expertise is most useful for administrators? And how can this expertise be embedded in administration, particularly at senior levels? In both cases, we notice the absence of a clear roadmap for enhancing expertise in government as well as a great degree of divergence in opinions and reform strategies over time.

The first question, on the kind of knowledge most useful for administrators, continues to divide opinion. Though reform reports generally argue in support of specialist knowledge, there are also strong arguments against this. For instance, the deep understanding of ground realities and essential know-how of the workings of the system are thought to equip career bureaucrats with skills to expertly navigate governance demands (Shetty, 2018; Subramaniam, 2018). These arguments also challenge the role of specialist expertise in the policymaking process itself. Many experts highlight that policymaking processes are often slow and require consensus, need to balance multiple and complex objectives, and are value-laden and incremental (Gupta, 2019; Kishore, 2019). As such, expertise plays a crucial role in this process but at its core, policymaking is deeply political. As a result, this school of thought suggests that specialist knowledge and domain expertise are being overvalued.

The impasse in this debate suggests the need for reform discourse to transcend this narrow specialist-generalist binary. In theory, domain assignment approaches that enable officers to build sectoral expertise through planned career progression and training, provides an exit from this conundrum. Despite the repeated emphasis and broad consensus on the need for domain assignment in reform reports, the idea has seen limited implementation.

This is perhaps an indication that the technical viability of a reform proposal is not enough to translate into adoption. Introducing domain assignment in the manner suggested by reports would involve a massive overhaul of the way in which officer postings currently happen. It would require a robust performance management process to identify officers' strengths and a redesigned training approach to provide the right skills at the right times. Further, domain assignment would be futile without addressing the issue of frequent transfers that makes it impossible for officers to gain sustained domain-based experience. Given the close linkages between expertise and other aspects of the administrative system, any real reform would be challenging without a strong alignment with deeper structural shifts.

Since there is no easy way to overhaul the existing system, could lateral entry become an important (and perhaps the only) way to induct expertise into government? While appealing in theory, the ad hoc and unstructured nature of the lateral entry process has caused tensions over integrity and transparency, and has led to resistance from incumbents and frustration for the recruits (Gupta, 2019; Shetty, 2018). From a comparative perspective, experience with sporadic lateral entry in other contexts suggests that the lack of a structured, transparent and institutionalised process creates challenges for both civil servants and lateral entrants. For example, ad hoc lateral entry in the Foreign Services in the US led to significant resistance to lateral entrants from serving civil servants, lowered departmental incentives to create new personnel systems to manage lateral entrants and limited career progression of lateral entrants (Hoskins and Kelly, 1988). Similarly in Brazil, the opacity of processes diminished departmental incentives to ensure talented lateral entrants were retained (OECD, 2009). Therefore, lateral entry in its current form, may not be the alternative to overhauling the system.

So where do we go from here? To move forward, the question of expertise can be fruitfully answered by interrogating broader questions about the structure of the bureaucracy. It is important to question in which part of the system we want to locate expertise and whether technical or functional knowledge should necessarily reside in senior policymaking positions. Many governance domains have a technical or functional cadre that works alongside the IAS with much less influence, like doctors and public health experts in the health sector, and teachers and school administrators in education. Empowering and building the capacity of these personnel to work effectively alongside policy and managerial personnel might be the solution to the generalist-specialist binary where both are valued equally, instead of being pitted against each other. Similarly, addressing systemic gaps in allied processes such as the introduction of conscious career planning for officers at the beginning of their careers and ensuring a minimum tenure length so that officers can develop expertise, could be key to the resolution of the expertise question (Ghate, 1998). What binds these specific interventions together, however, is a recognition of the fact that our bureaucracy is much more than its senior-most positions and elite cadres. Without rehauling, and instead by paying equal reform attention to government workers in states, districts, blocks, towns and villages, we can create a more knowledgeable, innovative and 'expert' bureaucracy.

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