ANALYSIS OF THE FEED BACK FROM OTHER CUSTOM PERSONNEL

In addition to the detailed statements received from the key managers who were associated with conception, planning and execution of CARES and ICES, a number of senior officials and supervisory personnel were either interviewed or requested for giving a feed back. Feedback was also obtained from users of the computerised system. A copy of representation made by the Mumbai custom house agents association is also enclosed in this annexure.

The summary of these feed backs is given below. Following personnel from Customs department and the users were interviewed during the study.

1. Mr. Anant Ram, Principal Commissioner, Mumbai (Airport)
2. Mr. P.C. Jha, Commissioner Excise, Mumbai
3. Mr. Z.B. Nagarkar, Systems Manager, CARES, MUMBAI
4. Mrs. Laxmi Ramnan, Joint Director, Customs, Ministry of Finance
5. Mr. C. Satpathy, Systems Manager, Customs, CARES, Calcutta
6. Mrs. K. Satpathy, Systems Manager, CARES, MADRAS
7. Mr. R.K. Sing, Deputy Collector, Customs, New Delhi
8. Mr. M.K. Srivastava, Senior Programmer, CARES Mumbai
9. Mr. H.K. Hirani, Appraiser, Customs Mumbai
10. Mr. C.V. George, Appraiser, Customs, Mumbai
11. Mr. Venkatesh, Appraiser Customs, Delhi (Air Cargo)
12. Mr. Jagdish, Appraiser Customs, Delhi (Air Cargo)
13. Mr. S. Aiyar, Appraiser Customs, Mumbai
14. Mr. Neelsh Gandhi, Director, Express Transport Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai
15. Mr. Vinod Gandhi, Director, Express Transport Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai
(Former President, Mumbai Customs House Agents Association)

The designations of all persons other than at serial 1,2 and 14,15 indicate the posts on which these persons worked in the projects under study. The analysis of the answers indicate that:

1) There was no criteria for selection of personnel for these projects. The general impression in the department has been to perceive posting in this activity as a ‘punishment’.

2) A majority of them thus were posted here without much knowledge.

3) As regards nature of training and its adequacy, the feedbacks indicate that the same was not enough to instill confidence in the staff. There was no training given to senior officers in using the system as a tool for MIS.

4) As regards the qualities that were looked for selection of other staff, the answers have been ‘nil’ for the same reasons as explained in 3.

5) From the purview of the questionnaire as to what incentives were provided for this work and whether the result would have been different without such an incentives it emerges that in this case a special pay was given to all persons working in this project. However this has been considered ‘too little’ by the staff so as to prove as a major incentive. There was no self-motivation generated in this case as in case of the railway project. The general feeling is some more incentives such as grant of one higher grade, special preference in allotment of quarters etc. could have made some difference. But there were inadequate efforts on part of
the team leaders etc. to remove the basic misconception from the minds of the staff.

6) As the new system did not offer any tangible benefits to the workers or the customers its implementation was haphazard. The feedbacks indicate that no serious thought was given to full replacement of the manual system with the result the partial computerisation only added more work for the ministerial staff as well as the customers.

7) All of them by and large have stated that as the new system was run in addition to the old system for years, the general impression is, it was never intended to replace the manual system. Thus it was looked at more as burden by the concerned staff and management. Only recently the ICES is replacing the manual system in irreversible manner which is now having a positive impact.

8) The feedbacks also indicate that as the new system instead of improving the old system added more steps in the then existing procedures such as data entry by appraisors, change in the sitting arrangements, addition of a new cadre of staff, the data entry operators etc., the new system did upset the then prevailing ‘line of command’ in the organisation with the result conflicts were generated.

9) The attitude of most of the senior managers and staff members towards this project has been evaluated as tolerant to hostile. This is because no one wanted manual intervention to go. The partial system only added more steps and increased delays.

10) In the initial implementation phase when the first system manager and his team with full support of the principal collector, Mumbai customs took interest in the implementation the unwilling workers also somehow tried to
follow the new system. But when the monitoring pressures eased off the system slowed down and slipped back in number of ways not planned in the system design.

11) The general evaluation of this change has been that while it did improve the statistical data collection yet as far as other parameters were concerned such as reducing time for scrutiny of documents, developing a good decision support system etc. this change was not so successful. In addition to what is summarised in paras 1 to 10 following observations have also been stated.
a) From initial stage the CARE software was based on only partial conversion of the work of data entry to computers and not computerisation of complete procedure as done later through ICES system.
b) There was little interaction between the staff, users and the software developers.
c) Most of the senior officers never took genuine interest to work and use the new system. After the change of chairman and the project leader at Delhi although a number of sporadic attempts were made by some system managers yet there was no seriousness about elimination of the manual system until 1990
d) The system managers were changed frequently and were given number of other duties leading to dilution in the day to day monitoring of the system because of which even the statistical work suffered.
e) The core change teams did not have good representation as in case of railways with the result the initial design had numerous defects as pointed out in the report by collector of customs, Calcutta 44
f) As the data was stored in raw form and then processed for any MIS, as
the volume of work increased the response became sluggish. Further adequate attention was not given to secure fall back procedures during breakdowns as well as the aspects of data integrity and security while developing the software causing lot of problems for the system managers and the users subsequently.

g) At the CBEC level no separate organisation was there to ensure uniformity in various centers and keeping abreast of the technology with the result the computers selected in eighties became obsolete.