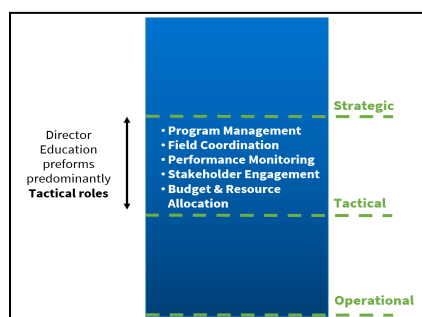


Understanding Strategic, Tactical, and Operational Roles in Government Administration

Abstract: Government officers play a critical role in the conceptualisation, implementation, and delivery of citizen-centric policies and schemes formulated by both the Central and State Governments. These officers play different roles in the governance ecosystem - **Strategic, Tactical, and Operational** - depending on their position, the nature of the task, and the context in which they function.

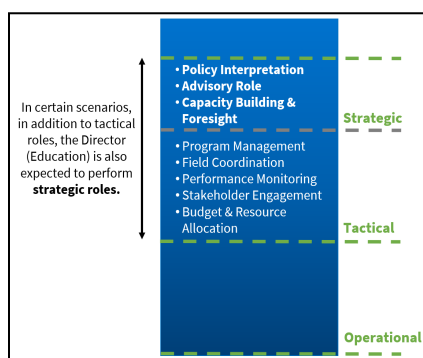
It is important to note that positions in government do not correspond to a fixed level of function. Rather, **the same designation may encompass different roles across different scenarios**, requiring the officer to navigate seamlessly between strategic visioning, tactical planning, and operational execution.

For instance, a **Director (Education)** in a State Education Department is typically responsible for tactical **roles** like execution of flagship education schemes such as Samagra Shiksha, PM SHRI, or Foundational Literacy and Numeracy missions. This involves interpreting policy guidelines, preparing state-level implementation plans, coordinating with district education officers, managing fund utilisation, monitoring key performance indicators (such as enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes), and ensuring timely reporting to the central ministry. In addition, the Director also convenes regular review meetings with implementing agencies, conducts gap analyses, and provides operational guidance for corrective action - all of which exemplify tactical-level coordination and problem-solving.



However, **the same Director may also be required to play a strategic role** in different contexts. For instance, in a state where a new educational reform agenda is being introduced - such as integrating vocational education with

mainstream schooling or designing a state-specific learning assessment framework - the Director may lead multi-stakeholder consultations, shape the implementation roadmap, and make policy-level recommendations to the Principal Secretary or the Education Minister. In such contexts, the Director becomes a key advisor shaping the medium- to long-term vision and enabling systemic transformation across the state's education ecosystem.



This dynamic nature of roles illustrates that while a Director (Education) may predominantly perform tactical functions, they are also expected to perform strategic and operational roles, based on the evolving requirements of governance.

This document further builds on this insight by outlining the definitions and distinguishing features of Strategic, Tactical, and Operational roles in governance.

1. Operational

1.1. What does the Operational Role Mean

The Operational role represents the foundational execution layer in public service delivery, where tasks are performed according to predefined frameworks, procedures, and guidelines. Officials in this role ensure work is carried out with precision, consistency, and adherence to standards of quality. Operational roles and responsibilities include implementing instructions, following regulations, and maintaining accuracy in documentation, data management - contributing to citizen-centric service delivery. Operational roles are crucial in maintaining the integrity of organisational processes, serving as the backbone of government and administrative functions. In this role, officials must demonstrate a thorough understanding of domain-specific regulations, technical requirements, and administrative procedures, along with proficiency

in using digital platforms (such as mobile apps for tracking attendance or data collection) and government-approved systems to streamline their work.

Operational roles are focused on practical, concrete thinking to directly implement policies and services at the grassroots level. These roles involve real-time, hands-on problem-solving, addressing immediate challenges while maintaining day-to-day service delivery. Additionally, responsibilities include adaptive decision-making based on direct interactions with beneficiaries, ensuring that services are responsive to local needs and issues, while tracking performance and collecting feedback for continuous improvement.

1.2 How Tasks Are Performed in this Role

Tasks in an operational role are performed by adhering to standard operating procedures (SOPs), maintaining meticulous records, and ensuring compliance with institutional guidelines. For example, when handling government documentation, officials in operational roles draft progress reports in the correct format, ensuring all necessary components are included and aligned with departmental policies and templates.

In addition to technical execution, officials in operational roles often serve as the first point of contact for public services and citizen engagement. They gather feedback from beneficiaries, address immediate challenges and report issues from the field for further action to support effective citizen-centric service delivery. Their work ensures that decision-making at other roles is based on reliable data and well-documented reports. Officials playing operational roles must demonstrate mastery over processes, regulations, and procedural requirements, follow standardised workflows, and utilise government portals (GeM, DARPAN, PFMS, etc.) and digital tools for efficient operations.

1.3 Measurement-Related Aspects of the Role

Proficiency for the operational roles can be measured based on how well tasks are executed, documented, and aligned with established procedures. Key areas for evaluation include task accuracy and compliance. In addition to this, documentation and data management are also evaluated to ensure records are accurate and organised for the officials. In this role, technical proficiency is also assessed by evaluating expertise in domain-specific elements, tools and systems. Process adherence is measured by the consistent application of defined workflows and compliance with regulatory requirements. To maintain high standards, assessments such as structured audits, quality checks, and supervisor reviews are used to evaluate the competency of operational role officials.

1.4 Relationship to Learning and Development

For the operational role, learning and development efforts for officials focus on enhancing technical expertise and improving digital proficiency. Officials playing operational roles benefit from training programs and capacity-building efforts that provide clarity on foundational domain knowledge, sectoral expertise, implementation strategies, and functional skills in government regulations, digital tools, and data management practices. In addition, initiatives like mentoring and field visits provide opportunities for officials to understand the real world challenges and take informed actions.

To effectively function in operational roles, officials must demonstrate a well-rounded blend of domain and behavioural competencies. For instance, officials at the grassroots levels working towards the implementation of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme require domain competencies in areas such as maternal and child health and nutrition, child immunization, growth monitoring, pre-school education, supplementary nutrition delivery, and a sound understanding of ICDS service guidelines and protocols. These technical skills should be complemented by behavioural competencies including empathy, trust-building, interpersonal communication, and community engagement, which are essential for effectively connecting with beneficiaries at the grassroots level.

Similarly, officials implementing ICDS at the state and national levels, need domain competencies in government functioning, administrative systems, public welfare schemes, documentation procedures, budgeting, and policy implementation frameworks. Their operational effectiveness gets determined by behavioural competencies such as team leadership, decision-making, coordination, mentoring, and accountability, which enable them to manage staff, ensure compliance, and maintain smooth administrative workflows.

2. Tactical:

2.1 What does the Tactical Role Mean

The Tactical Role serves as the critical bridge between strategic planning and operational execution within public service delivery. Officials in this role ensure that high-level goals and policies are effectively translated into actionable plans, overseeing resource allocation, risk assessment, and performance monitoring to achieve organisational objectives. Officials in this role act as the link between decision-makers and citizen-implementers, ensuring that strategies are contextually adapted and effectively deployed. This

role embodies "Doing and Applying", where responsibilities include not only implementing directives but also applying and assessing their impact, refining processes, and addressing challenges to improve service delivery. Tactical roles focus on data-driven decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and cross-sector collaboration to optimise efficiency and responsiveness in service delivery.

Officials in this role demonstrate analytical, practical thinking to refine and implement actionable plans. They focus on real-time decision-making, utilising conflict management, negotiation, and persuasion, along with adaptive problem-solving to overcome obstacles and ensure that national strategies are executed efficiently on the ground.

2.2 How Tasks Are Performed in this Role

Officials in tactical roles oversee, refine, and adjust implementation efforts to ensure that policy goals are met efficiently. Roles typically extend to proactively identifying inefficiencies, addressing bottlenecks, and refining operational and implementation frameworks. Some tactical roles include developing structured frameworks with adaptive problem-solving skills, ensuring that governance remains responsive, efficient, and aligned with the needs of citizens. Tactical roles require strong decision-making skills, stakeholder engagement capabilities, and a deep understanding of personnel, financial and administrative implications to ensure effective policy execution.

Officials in the tactical role need strong people skills, behavioral competencies, analytical thinking, and process refinement abilities to manage team dynamics, foster collaboration, resolve conflicts, and improve implementation through monitoring, evaluation, and feedback integration. Tactical roles and responsibilities also involve adaptive decision-making, adjusting strategies in response to on-ground challenges and emerging risks, thereby maintaining responsive and effective governance.

2.3 Measurement-Related Aspects of the Role

Proficiency for officials in tactical roles is assessed based on effectiveness of decision-making, ability to monitor progress, identify inefficiencies, and introduce course corrective measures. It is also measured by the impact of their coordination and stakeholder engagement, efficiency in resource utilisation, and the ability to anticipate risks, implement solutions, and adjust strategies in real time.

2.4 Relationship to Learning and Development

For the tactical role, learning and development initiatives should strengthen behavioural competencies on decision-making, team management, conflict resolution, negotiation and stakeholder management. Initiatives should also focus on functional competencies such as advanced data analysis for policy

benchmarking, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation, and frameworks for adaptive governance, agile implementation, and policy refinement.

Officials in this role could benefit from mentorship programs and structured leadership pathways, which prepare them for more strategic roles and equip them to address complex governance challenges.

3. Strategic:

3.1 What does the Strategic Role Mean

The strategic role is where officials focus on shaping the long-term vision, mission, and values of their Ministry or Department while ensuring alignment with national priorities, policy commitments, and global standards. In this role, responsibilities include translating broad government policies into actionable programs, designing regulatory frameworks, and making high-impact decisions that determine the success of public administration and governance. This role embodies "Learning, Applying, and Teaching Others How to Do It", requiring officials to not only develop and implement strategies but also mentor teams, foster collaboration, and guide departments toward achieving sustainable, citizen-focused outcomes.

Officials in the strategic role are future-focused, utilising predictive, conceptual, and abstract thinking to anticipate challenges and opportunities. They connect various sectors and trends to design forward-thinking approaches, shaping policies toward addressing long-term societal impacts. They demonstrate proficiency in higher-order leadership behavioural competencies including strategic and visionary leadership, systems thinking, strategic communication, change management and advocacy.

Thus, they play a critical role in identifying emerging issues and connecting the dots across diverse factors to ensure governance is future-ready by anticipating risks, leveraging data-driven insights, and strengthening institutional frameworks to drive lasting policy and programmatic impact.

3.2 How Tasks Are Performed in this Role

Officials in the strategic role contribute to citizen-focused impact by co-creating policies, setting governance priorities, and ensuring institutional efficiency. Their role involves securing funding, adapting policies to socio-economic and technological shifts, and refining implementation frameworks based on data insights and ground-level feedback. They mentor teams, oversee cross-sectoral collaboration, and guide departments in achieving strategic objectives while ensuring policy continuity and resilience.

Officials must demonstrate thought leadership, policy foresight, and the ability to mobilise resources and partnerships. Their competencies extend beyond execution and tactical oversight, requiring them to build alliances, advocate for systemic change, and maintain adaptable governance structures. Key attributes for officials in this role include long-term policy alignment with government priorities, stakeholder convergence and advocacy, institutional capacity building, risk management, and data-driven decision-making, ensuring sustainable and future-proof strategies.

3.3 Measurement-Related Aspects of the Role

Officials in the strategic role should be assessed on their ability to ensure that policies and programs align with national priorities, sectoral trends, and long-term governance objectives. Their competence should be measured by how well they engage stakeholders, influence policy outcomes, drive consensus, and secure strategic partnerships. Additionally, they should be evaluated on their impact in institutional strengthening, including capacity-building initiatives, mentorship programs, and systemic improvements that drive organisational development. Their performance should also be gauged based on resource mobilisation and risk mitigation strategies, ensuring optimal funding allocation, proactive challenge anticipation, and the implementation of adaptive governance frameworks.

3.4 Relationship to Learning and Development

Officials in this role require continuous learning in global governance trends, leadership methodologies, and emerging technologies. Professional development includes executive leadership training in areas including policy foresight, crisis management, and institutional reforms.

In this role, officials should require proficiency in core leadership and strategic behavioural competencies such as strategic vision and foresight, systems thinking, adaptability and learning agility, technological proficiency, global awareness, change management, and strategic communication.

Navigating Strategic, Tactical, and Operational Roles: Examples from the Field

As discussed earlier in the document, government positions are not rigidly confined to a single role. The nature of governance - often complex, adaptive, and interdependent - requires officials to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities by stepping into different roles. For instance, an Assistant Section Officer (ASO) is considered to primarily perform operational roles, Directors to perform tactical roles, and Secretaries to perform strategic roles. However, all these officials may be required to perform strategic, tactical, and operational roles depending on the evolving demands of governance.

To illustrate how officials navigate these roles, the following examples highlight how position holders at both the Government of India and State Government levels take on roles across the S/T/O spectrum. These roles, shaped by the nature of the task, stage of implementation, and urgency, demonstrate how officials adapt their approach to the demands of specific initiatives and administrative contexts.

The scenarios feature:

- Assistant Section Officers, Directors, and Secretaries at the Central Level, Government of India
- Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), and State Directors, ICDS at the State Level

Scenario 1: Roles in the Government of India

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, has embarked on a major reform initiative to overhaul its grievance redressal system. The objective is to make the system more responsive, efficient, and citizen-friendly. This initiative requires the involvement of officials from across different levels of the system. This includes Ms. Priya Sharma, an **Assistant Section Officer (ASO)**, who primarily performs an operational role; Mr. Amit Verma, **the Director**, who primarily performs a tactical role; and Ms. Rekha Menon, **the Secretary**, who primarily performs a strategic role in this context. While they each perform their primary roles; they may also be expected to take on additional roles depending on the evolving requirements of the initiative. The following scenarios illustrate how their roles may shift in different contexts.

1. Assistant Section Officer (ASO)

At the early stages of implementing the grievance redressal reform initiative, establishing strong foundational systems is critical to ensure smooth functioning. In this context, Priya Sharma, as an Assistant Section Officer (ASO), primarily plays **an operational role**. Her work focuses on building and maintaining these essential systems to enable the reform to function smoothly.

Her roles include:

- Documentation
- Data Management
- Procedural Compliance
- Report Writing

This work, foundational to any grievance redressal system, reflects the **operational role** Priya plays - ensuring that the data is accurate, structured, and ready for decision-makers to act on.

With Change in Context

However, as the reform effort gathers momentum, a review meeting is held where district officers raise concerns about confusion in categorising overlapping complaint types. Drawing from her close familiarity with the cases, Priya is expected to work with the Director to flag these issues and support smoother implementation. In doing so, she performs a **tactical role** that helps shape how the grievance redressal system functions. In this context, her roles include:

- Process Improvement
- Capacity Support for Field Implementation

In doing so, Priya, while continuing to perform **her primary operational role**, also takes on a **tactical role in this context** - shaping the very processes that determine how data is interpreted and acted upon.

To summarise, an ASO primarily plays an operational role, but may play tactical roles as reform efforts evolve.

2. Director

As the reporting officer for Priya, and the node for coordination across verticals, Amit primarily plays a **tactical role** in this initiative. Some of his roles include:

- Coordination and Synthesis
- Policy Articulation
- Quality Assurance
- Data-driven Decision Making

With Change in Context

As the grievance redressal reform progresses, there is an increasing need for a more integrated and efficient system to manage complaints effectively. In this context, the secretary expects Amit to play a critical role in bridging day-to-day data work with medium-term process improvements. Recognising the evolving demands, he drafts a policy note for a digitized, time-bound grievance redress platform.

During this phase, while continuing his tactical responsibilities, in the changed context Amit also plays a **strategic role**. In this context, his roles include:

- Policy Formulation
- Strategic Alignment

Later, as the reform reaches a critical integration phase, Amit supports the Secretary by playing certain **operational roles**. In this context, his operational roles include:

- Documentation and Reporting
- Interdepartmental Coordination

Here, he temporarily takes on an **operational role**, demonstrating how tactical leaders often need to roll up their sleeves to enable strategic decisions to move forward smoothly.

To summarise, a Director primarily plays a tactical role, but may play strategic or operational roles depending on the context.

3. Secretary

As the Central Government intensifies efforts to make grievance redressal more responsive, citizen-centric, and aligned with administrative reforms, strong leadership at the top becomes critical. In this context, Rekha Menon, the Secretary, plays a pivotal role in anchoring the Ministries' vision for the initiative. She is responsible for situating the grievance redressal overhaul within the broader governance and service delivery priorities. To this end, Rekha primarily plays a **strategic role**—guiding the long-term direction, ensuring inter-departmental alignment, and enabling policy coherence. Her roles include:

- Strategic Leadership
- Framework Design
- Policy Implementation

Her role is **strategic** in nature - focused on enabling systemic change, institutionalising reforms, and ensuring alignment with governance priorities at the highest level.

With Change in Context

When key bottlenecks arise—such as discrepancies in categorising complaints—Rekha Menon sometimes steps into **tactical roles** to address these challenges. She takes on the tactical role of resolving issues between teams as the situation demands. In this context, her roles include:

- Cross-Departmental/ Ministry Coordination
- Resource Prioritization and Allocation for Issue Resolution

These **tactical roles** ensure that the reform stays on track, while her **strategic role** allows her to make high-level decisions based on ground-level insights and data.

To summarise, a Secretary primarily plays a strategic role but may play tactical roles as circumstances require.

Example 2: Roles in the State

The Department of Women and Child Development in Bihar is working to strengthen the delivery of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, particularly in high-burden regions such as flood-prone Supaul. Effective implementation of ICDS across Anganwadis involves multiple position holders at different levels—Ms. Meena Kumari, **Anganwadi Worker (AWW)**, who primarily performs an operational role; Ms. Rekha Sinha, **the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO)**, who primarily performs a tactical role; and Ms. Rati Mishra, **the State Director (ICDS) Bihar**, who primarily performs a strategic role in this context. However, real-world challenges, collaboration with the state government, and evolving contexts often require them to take on additional roles. The following scenarios illustrate how their roles may shift in different contexts.

1. Anganwadi Worker (AWW)

In the ICDS delivery system, frontline service delivery is critical to ensure beneficiaries receive essential health, nutrition and education services. As an Anganwadi Worker (AWW), Meera Kumari primarily plays an **operational role** in enabling this access at the grassroots level.

Her roles include:

- Early Childhood Education Facilitation
- Growth Monitoring and Nutritional Surveillance
- Convergence Support for Health and Nutrition Days

This work, foundational to ICDS' success, reflects that Meera's role is primarily **operational** ensuring that services reach to the intended beneficiaries regularly and effectively.

With Change in Context

However, in some communities, the uptake of the ICDS scheme remains low, with indicators like immunisation and nutrition showing a decline. In such cases, the CDPO assigns Meera a **tactical role** to address these challenges on the ground. Drawing from her grassroots knowledge, Meera helps identify key bottlenecks—ranging from local beliefs to seasonal migration—that affect service delivery. In this context,

she plays a **tactical role** by shaping how services are communicated and adopted by the community and by feeding these insights back to Rekha (CDPO). In this context, her roles include:

- Behaviour Change Communication and Tailored Messaging
- Community Mobilisation and Outreach Coordination

In doing so, Meera, while continuing to perform her primary **operational role**, also takes on a **tactical role** in this context - designing and leading targeted behaviour change campaigns. Her efforts influence how communities understand and engage with ICDS services, allowing for more effective uptake of interventions.

To summarise, an AWW primarily plays an operational role, but may take on tactical roles as contexts evolve.

2. Child Development Project Officer (CDPO)

Ensuring consistent and quality delivery of ICDS services across multiple Anganwadi Centres requires strong on-ground coordination and supportive supervision, especially when frontline workers face implementation challenges or service uptake is uneven across regions. As the supervisor for multiple AWWs in the ICDS Delivery System, Rekha Sinha, as the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), plays a **primarily tactical role**—supporting and supervising a network of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs). Her responsibilities focus on enabling smoother execution and aligning grassroots efforts with program objectives.

Her roles include:

- ICDS Scheme Implementation
- Data Collection and Record Maintenance
- Community Awareness and Local Mobilisation

Her primarily **tactical role** ensures that AWWs are supported, data flows reliably upwards, and community-facing events are executed as per schemes.

With Change in Context

However, with the state's launch of a new nutrition campaign, implementation demands shift, requiring closer oversight at the district/block level to ensure success. In this context, Rekha is expected to take on more **operational roles**, directly managing campaign activities and serving as a crucial link between the Director and the State Machinery. Her efforts help translate Rati's (State Director) strategic vision into actionable ground-level outcomes.

In this context, her roles include:

- Needs Assessment
- Action Plan Development

While Rekha primarily plays a **tactical role**, in this context she performs **operational roles** to ensure effective on-ground implementation. Her operational role helps translate policy direction into action, ensuring that health and nutrition outcomes are improved in a timely and targeted manner. *To summarise, a CDPO primarily performs tactical roles, however when the context is changed, she may also play operational roles.*

3. State Director (ICDS)

Ensuring effective, end-to-end implementation of the new nutrition campaign across Bihar requires strong coordination and monitoring to address challenges at the district level. In this context, Rati Mishra primarily plays a **tactical role**, focusing on translating policy into practice by coordinating, monitoring, and troubleshooting implementation issues across districts. She ensures that the state strategy set by the State Cabinet and the Women and Child Development (W&CD) Secretary is effectively executed on the ground. Her roles include:

- ICDS Quality Assurance Monitoring
- Resource Management
- Progress Monitoring and Reporting
- Interdepartmental Coordination

With Change in Context

When ICDS outcomes show limited progress despite consistent frontline and block level efforts, Rati is called upon to steer a course correction. In this context, she takes charge of setting a renewed vision, defining priorities, and driving systematic systemic improvements that align with Bihar's development goals. She regularly engages with frontline and block-level officials, such as AWWs and CDPOs, to understand the ground realities, ensuring her decisions are both strategic and informed. It is in this context that Rati plays a **strategic role**. Some of her strategic roles include:

- State-Level Planning and Policy Formulation
- Resource Mobilisation and Fund Management

Rati is expected to play different roles depending on the context. For instance, while planning state-level resource mobilisation and fund management, she may need to play a **strategic role** by setting funding priorities, aligning resource allocation with the state's development goals, and ensuring that district plans are incorporated into the overall state strategy. At the same time, her active involvement in **tactical roles** ensures the ICDS scheme remains responsive and effective in Bihar. By balancing both, she is able to make high-level decisions that are grounded in real-time field realities.

To summarise, a State Director primarily plays tactical roles but as circumstances demand, she may also play strategic roles.

This document has been prepared by CEGIS under the guidance and inputs from Dr. R Balasubramaniam, Member-HR, Capacity Building Commission

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