

ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES AND ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES AND UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT=

The Administration refers to the management of an organization and its business. It involves the efficient use of staff, information, and other resources to achieve outputs and objectives. One major challenge in administration is effective communication which is very basic but essential requirement to manage all the day to day operations i.e. to inform, to request, to persuade, to direct, to control, to organize, to take decision, to coordinate to issue orders and to build goodwill. In administrative communication, one must be cautious as to what one writes or says as it can induce action and behaviour in others. The primary function of administration in the management is to facilitate the overall optimal performance of the people and the organization, to achieve the goal of the organization. The article through real life cases will explain how ineffective and careless communication can make simple situations chaotic and affect the organization. Without good communication, the internal and external structure of an organization can face several challenges that can ultimately lead to loss of face especially in an educational setup. The real cases in the article have been taken from an educational institution to draw important role of communication.

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

Administration is management of any organization and also very important to educational setups. The successful administration requires efficient management of information communication and all the resources like people, finance and stakeholders to accomplish organizational objectives. Information is key to all administrative operations and people by making use of the information work and contributes to an organization's success. Information - whether content or dissemination is nothing but communication.

The employees in organizations need to communicate in order to co-ordinate the work and to inform others outside the department or business about their products and services. The ability to communicate effectively is also a top characteristic of a successful leader. The communication skills are vital to the success of any workplace be academic or non-academic. It is important to state that job skills alone do not suffice for success. The effective communication in the form of a written document or a conversation reflect on the employee and the organization. The impression students, parents and business associates form about the staff and organization are important and lasting. Many of these impressions are based solely on the communication which is done. If the communication skills of the staff are poor, others may question his / her abilities. Therefore, if you are extremely intelligent, talented, and knowledgeable but lack communication skills it could adversely affect your organization by putting away customers and potential ones.

Thus, effective communication is the first basic prerequisite for effective and successful administration, failing which the concerned official(s) or organization may have to face various challenges and many a time huge losses and reputation as well.

DEFINING COMMUNICATION:

Many definitions of communication are available. Let us take a few; Rita Udall and Sheila Udall (1979) opine that communication is 'a process by which a person or a group shares and reports information to another person or group so that people clearly understand one another. According to Paul Leagens Communication is "a process by which two or more people exchange ideas, facts, feelings or impressions in

ways that each gains a 'common understanding' of meaning, intent and use of a message." Another very important aspect of communication for running smooth administration is highlighted by Aristotle- "Communication is a means of persuasion to influence the other so that the desired effect is achieved."

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

In administration, the officials spend most of their working time communicating with people around them. A good administrator has to perform various activities in his day to day work i.e. organizing, giving directions, making decisions, supervising, controlling and coordinating. For these, along with his/her knowledge and other skills, one inevitable requirement is effective communication. Besides, the issuance of orders and producing participative responses is completely dependent on communication. Good communication, apart from helping in administration, determines the personality of the administrator as well. Administration may fail if it lacks credibility, objectivity, trustworthiness, truthfulness and fairness. People in administration must exercise caution in their oral as well as written communication as what is said cannot be unsaid and what is communicated through written channel of communication, can induce action and behaviour in others. So, to provide a huge boost to productivity administrators should make sure that they communicate in the most effective possible way. For administrators and organizations, poor communication costs money and wastes time. One study found that 14% of each workweek is wasted on poor communication (Armour, S., 1998).

The article, with the help of real life , the names are disguised for reasons, highlights various dimensions of communication in academic administration and illustrates how communication can make positive or negative results and thus can affect business and management. In organizations, several times, some of the most unintended errors prove to be the most costly for organizations: The data available (HOLMES REPORT 16 JUL 2011) show us how heavy the cost of poor communication can be:

1. \$37 billion: total estimated cost of employee misunderstanding (including actions or errors of omission by employees who have misunderstood or were misinformed about company policies, business processes, job function or a combination of the three) in 100,000-employee companies, among 400 surveyed corporations in the U.S. and U.K. (average cost per company is \$62.4 million per year).
2. \$26,041: cumulative cost per worker per year due to productivity losses resulting from communications barriers.

Case - 1

In XYZ college, a request to provide more class-room chairs for students was sent vide an email to Purchase Officer (PO) by Administrative Officer (AO) of the college. The AO was not aware of the term 'Writing Arm Chairs' hence used 'Class-Room Chairs for students' in the email. The PO did not bother to clarify what kind of chairs the college wanted, whether desks are required or not and placed the order for regular chairs, assuming that they already had enough desks.

Due to this miscommunication order was placed for items that were not required and there was chaos and embarrassment on the day of Orientation due to non-availability of sufficient furniture. After too many arguments and blame-game 'Writing-Arm-Chairs' were procured and provided to the college. But the small miscommunication led to:

- i. Embarrassment on the day of orientation which the college authorities had to face;
- ii. Financial loss and burden of extra chairs; and
- iii. Stress and bitterness in relationship of the two officers involved.

The embarrassment in front of parents and fresher's, loss of face, visible embarrassment on the first day, impression on parents and students, financial losses and bitterness could have been avoided if the order had been communicated correctly by the AO or the PO had clarified before placing the order.

CASE -2

The XYZ institutions have various Regional Offices within and outside the country. The Regional Offices are headed by employees at the level of Managers or Sr. Managers reporting to Director-Admissions in Head Quarters. All rules and regulations with respect to admissions, both national and international, and scholarship schemes are formulated by Director Admissions.

To make higher number of admissions of the students, the Manager promised the candidates to give 50% scholarship to all the students who will take admission in that institute. The administrator did this without any information to the authorities or taking prior approval to offer such scheme.

45 foreign students were admitted to various course offered by the institution. A few months later the Manager resigned for a change of job. Since no approval was officially taken and recorded by the manager, scholarship could not grant to the students. The accounts department started issuing reminders and started putting pressure on the students to pay complete fee for which students were not ready. No one believed the students as there was no written communication in this regard from the then Manager. Finally, the students had to pay complete fee for issuance of the Degree.

The whole episode affected future admissions from the Region, added financial burden on students and brought bad name to the institution.

CASE - 3

ABC Medical College sends its students for Postings to its Health Centres located in X and Y areas, respectively. The new Administrative Assistant was not aware of the location of centres. Therefore, before sending the request for arrangement of transport, he enquired about the locations of centres from a Colleague and was informed that they are located in X and Z areas. An email, requesting to provide the vehicles (buses) for visit to Health Centres in X and Z areas was sent and was approved by the concerned authorities. The teachers and students on reaching Z area were unable to find the Health Centre. There was chaos and frustration. On enquiring, it was discovered that the particular Health Centre was located in Y area not Z area. The distance between two locations was found to be over 35 kms. The driver was instructed and finally the teachers and students reached the correct location 1 hour 30 minutes late and had to face the wrath of seniors and Health Centre Incharge. Why did this happen?

Careless typing and less concern for the outcome of one letter “z” – area ‘z’ instead of ‘Y’ created the whole confusion and chaos. The unawareness of the new staff and negligence of others led to delay, mayhem, frustration and unnecessary travel and cost.

CHALLENGES:

1. **TRANSMISSION OF CORRECT INFORMATION:** The Correct knowledge and transmission of information is the basic foundation of administration. Careless attitude towards it can create chaos and can cost a lot to the organization.
2. **COMMUNICATION GAP:** Communication gap and its resulting loss has drawn attention of the researchers to study these gaps and to plug it so that unwanted situations may not arise because of this.

When communication gaps arise, the results may be disastrous like - confusion, unclear motives, misaligned priorities, indecisive actions, frustration. The communication gaps could be caused by technological problems, personal problems, personality differences, generational differences, closed door policy etc. Whatever the reason, bridging these gaps requires an extensive analysis of the issues and corrective steps to rectify the problems.

3. **THE CLARITY & COMPLETENESS OF COMMUNICATION:** The information must be clear and complete and the sender and receiver must have the complete knowledge of the jargons used. The understanding between the two must be confirmed or there may be serious consequences. Action should not be based on assumptions.
4. **NON-COMMUNICATION:** Because of infrequent communication of staff members between them, the departments get out of sync and it becomes difficult to work together on group projects. The lack of communication causes serious efficiency problems, and at the end of the day there is no substantial productivity. It is therefore absolutely essential for every university to stress upon communication. There may be several reasons for non –communication like people with difference in capabilities might avoid talking to each other. This results in lack of cooperation and coordination and may give stress to both persons and may affect the administration like missed deadlines, altered project directions, resulting blame game frustration to all concerned. Counseling to improve communication techniques and ensuring that colleagues follow shared communication protocols can help alleviate the problem.
5. **TIMELY INFORMATION:** Due attention and importance to timely information to concerned department can avoid negative ramifications, mismanagement and Suffering to all concerned.

IMPLEMENTATION & COMMUNICATION

The ultimate purpose of administration is to manage various things and to get things implemented successfully. This is possible when –

- i. There is mutual understanding among all the concerned and
 - ii. All the policies, objectives and relevant information is regularly articulated to all the employees.
- Communication is a means through which the task and the resources needed to carry out an assignment, the roles and duties and the expected results are made known to the subordinates which makes work easier for better performance.
- Good and positive communication is essential to create congenial relations between people / departments and healthy progressive environment in an organization and thus, it is important for smooth administration. An organization functions by means of collective actions of individuals at every level. Good communication inclusive of effective listening is required to achieve coordinated results. If it lacks, there may be adverse consequence.

ADMINISTRATION AND ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP:

Leadership is very important in universities and have far reaching consequences for any educational setup. The association between employee satisfaction and job performance suggests that an important contributor to the employee's engagement within the organization is the leader employee relationship. Lee and Chuang (2009) explain that an excellent leader not only inspires subordinates, giving them the potential to enhance efficiency, but also meets their requirements in the process of achieving organizational goals. Effective and efficient administration is possible if the whole administrative team has job satisfaction and is motivated. This great responsibility lies on the shoulders of the administrative leader. The Successful administrator must have the ability to - induce desirable responses in others by using strategic communication to persuade (influence); listen openly and send convincing messages (communicate); inspire and guide groups and individuals, nurture instrumental relationships, work with others toward a shared goal (collaboration, cooperation); and create group synergy in pursuing collective goals.

CONCLUSION

We discussed the role and importance of academic communication in this article. Academic administrative communications should be as a matter of fact portray credibility, trust worthiness and truthfulness. The

administrators must show fairness and objectivity and the sources of information should be duly acknowledged. If information and instructions are not clearly conveyed and shared properly and if accountability is not clearly fixed, the results may be disastrous. What one writes or says can induce action and behaviour in others. Therefore, business or administrative communicators must be cautious in their communication. Consistent and strategic communication helps to connect people – an essential pre-requisite for successful administration. The case studies used in this article are taken from various universities by interviewing people and students. It is now a well-established fact that rules, regulations and their execution is clearly followed and promulgated to all the stakeholders. The role of management of the universities becomes more important which though remains to be tested and is a matter of further research.

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