UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPROVEMENT
A FEW SUGGESTIONS

By

Dr. Guruprasad Murthy
Professor, JBIMS
University of Bombay

"Whoever makes two blades of grass grow
where only one grew before deserves
better of mankind than any speculative
philosopher or metaphysical system builder"

Jonathan Swift.
I. The University Administration has the difficult task of serving the multifarious needs of different sections of the community - students, teachers from a wide variety of disciplines, representatives of different houses and above all the public at large. In meeting the expectations of different sections of the society the administration has to be clear of what its objectives are so that all the subsequent events of the administration are geared to meet the same. Hence it is proposed to set out the objectives at the outset.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The Objectives of the University Administration include:

* to assist to run different academic/socially relevant programmes in accordance with prescribed criteria;
* to operate on a cost and time effective basis and preferably surplus generating;
* to provide effective and efficient services to the student community;
* to maintain inter-personal and inter-departmental communication, cohesion and harmony to elicit ‘goal directed’ behaviour; and
* to keep abreast of the latest Management Practices and imbibe the same in day to day work to effectively achieve the objectives listed above.

To accomplish the objectives set-out, there has to be a systematic management process governing the tasks of individuals and groups at different levels of management which can motivate the personnel to contribute to the organisational goals. One of the approaches is to have a Management Planning and Control Systems.

III. What is Control?

Control means the process which keeps a continuous tab on the actual events taking place for purposes of comparison with the intended events. Such a comparison provides a feedback regarding the extent of conformance or otherwise with the plans and provides signals to the person/s in charge of various activities. These signals could be favourable in which case the status quo can prevail of course with quest for further improvements. The signals could also be unfavourable in which case the individuals/groups responsible for these unfavourable deviations have to initiate corrective action or get corrective action initiated from the higher authorities to prevent the recurrence of the said unfavourable deviations. It should be noted that controls imply the existence of plans and that the time-table of events to occur for an ensuring academic/calendar year has to be known in advance. Otherwise the control process cannot go into action.

IV. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AS KEY TO PERFORMANCE:

A key factor which influences performance and the effectiveness and adequacy of the Control System is Organisational structure, which has to be so designed and maintained as to motivate the employees and spur them towards the goals of the organisation. In this context it is necessary to note that in the University Administrative set-up the typical hierarchy may act as a barrier to spur people into action. Within the constraints of the existing system, an attempt to decentralise the ‘Activities’ and the decision making governing the same will help to:

* assign responsibilities and authority to carry out the tasks by individuals/groups even at lower levels in the structure.
* perform a self-appraisal and subordinate assessment, from time to time, of the strong and weak points of the people
and also ascertain causes of the favourable/unfavourable performances;

* facilitate performance evaluation of these individuals/groups regarding the accomplishment or otherwise of the tasks so assigned;

* identify gaps in the talents of the individuals/groups and allow for opportunities for self-development through continuing education viz. in house training programmes, deputation to “Select Programmes” organised by leading business schools or formal higher education;

* Provide opportunities for job satisfaction, enrichment, development and even diversification. Through decentralisation, the individuals/groups are given direct exposure to the process of contributing to the goals of the organisation. It also provides an opportunity to locate talent for the future and prepare a second line of defence. And above all if the lower levels in the organisational structure can deliver the goods/services, the top management/middle management of the administration in that order, can address themselves to their real roles of contributing to assist the office of the Vice-Chancellor/Pro-Vice-Chancellor/ Academic Bodies in the developmental and perspective planning process of the University; and

* flatten an otherwise tall structure - a flat structure provides greater opportunities for involvement in the job and augments job satisfaction unlike a tall structure which makes it difficult for personnel to have independent access to tasks.

V. Implementation

The implementation of decentralisation is undoubtedly beset with many problems and requires handling with dexterity. The following aspects have to be taken care of if decentralisation is to bring results;

(A) Continuous Interaction both Intra-Department and Inter-Department through formal and informal channels so that there can be exchange of views on the ordinances, rules, regulations governing eligibility criteria, examinations, schemes of assessment, standards of passing and the like. The personnel at different levels of management must be on a common wavelength so that a uniform strategy can be evolved to tackle the issues that arise or are likely to arise from time to time. The interaction is particularly required following immediately the introduction of new ordinances or announcements of new rules and regulations or schemes which have to be administered by the said decentralised units. If the lower levels grope in the dark regarding the interpretation of ordinances/rules/regulations there is a tendency to shun the work, avoid the public for delivering the goods and services and above all there is a propensity towards decentralisation or upward delegation defeating the very purpose underlying decentralisation.

(B) Formal Learning Channels

Individuals/Groups who have been assigned tasks should also be motivated to undertake the challenge of learning both on the job and otherwise. A formal diploma/certificate course in University Administration and Accounts can be thought of under the auspices of either the Academic Staff College or Garware Institute or JBIMS. This diploma course should facilitate evolving a learning process which is functional and tailor made to the ‘on the job needs’ of the personnel and the organisation.

A Centre for University Administration or Administrative Staff College under the auspices of any of the above institutions
can evolve a 3 tier programme.

* a certificate course for clerks/Head Clerks/Superintendents;

* a middle management programme for those to be promoted to the level of the Assistant Registrar.

* a senior officers' annual conference (Assistant Registrars/Deputy Registrars) with the top management (Vice Chancellor/Pro-Vice Chancellor/Registrar) and the Heads of Departments to chalk out the strategy for the ensuing academic year.

This will make learning possible through multi-channels and on a serious proposition and will be directed to a meaningful purpose.

(C) Marathikaran* and Performance

Performance depends on Skills, Attitudes and Motivation. Now decentralisation implies shifting the units of responsibility and relevant authority to lower levels in the organisation. This amounts to higher expectations from those at the lower levels and also independent courses of action like ‘drafting’/‘communicating with concerned parties’ - say, The use of English Language which may not be the forte of the ‘Personnel’ could be a serious stumbling block and also the cause of insecurity at lower levels justifying and forcing decentralisation through upward delegation may be even to the level of the Deputy Registrar. Marathikaran will help unleash the hidden potential to perform at least the modicum tasks required at different levels, particularly at lower levels. This will reinforce the attitudes and motivation and help to rejuvenate the skills too by willing and uninhibited participation in the job performing and learning process that is indicated above. In short, it is the personal view of the author that Marathikaran will increase the output of the personnel at lower levels, leaving room for the top and middle management of the administration and the academic world of the University to address themselves to their true tasks.

(D) Willingness to Part with Authority

Decentralisation demands as a pre-requisite the willingness on the part of the seniors to part with authority to allow the lower levels of management to function independently. If such a willingness does not exist the entire scheme of evolving responsibility, units at lower levels will fail and the remedy may be worse than the disease. This requires appropriate sort of attitudes at the officers levels who must be made to see the positive advantages of decentralisation.

(E) Use of the Self Appraisal and Subordinate Assessment :

Personnel Performance Appraisal is a continuous tasks and cannot culminate following confirmation. It extends up to the point of exit (voluntary or involuntary). The annual appraisal must provide for a ‘Confidential Report’ (C.R.) to be in operation for all employees on a continuous basis. This helps to spur the individual towards higher performance levels in expectations of commendation and possible advantages of the same. It also helps the employer and the employee and should be a mutually rewarding experience of course adverse entries will trigger off possible rifts between the aggrieved employee, reporting officer and reviewing officer interse, leading to possible employer-employee litigation. But that does not per se destroy the utility of the performance Appraisal System through the C.R.

(F) Yardsticks for Performance Evaluation:

Once active decentralisation takes place

* Making use of Marathi Language as the Official means of communication in Administration.
there is a need to develop, as far as possible, certain objective yardsticks for evaluation. Certain segments lend themselves to measurement through tangible yardsticks. Just as a production manager in a factory is measured for his performance in terms of production quantity, quality, cost and delivery schedules, examination activity is almost like a production process - pre-examination, during examination and post examination. The yardsticks impliedly used are number of examinations conducted, time schedule of each process described above, cost of the activity and overall quality of performance. Similarly other segments of the administration have to be evaluated through yardsticks which can assess amongst other things the quantity, quality, cost and delivery schedules of the activities. This will require careful study and planning exercises for laying down acceptable norms.

(G) Use of Computers

Computers today are an indispensable tool - particularly for purpose of ‘time saving’ and quick decision making. The use of computers has to transcend beyond ‘Examination Activity’ to other activities. In fact the use of computers has to be accepted at all levels of management starting with the top. The use of PC’s (Personal Computers) in the offices of the top management/senior officers, all linked through LAN (Local Area networking) will help to share simultaneously relevant information from a common data bank with facility for retrieval without resorting to the usual search for people, files and papers. This will help all persons in charge of different activities to react/decide within decreasing reaction of time thereby improving speed of decision making and the cost, quality and quantity of services offered to the concerned users.

(H) Legal, Management and Public Relations Services.

Decentralisation will increase the exposure of employees to different sections of society. As a part of the support systems appropriate legal or management advisory inputs will be required periodically to update the employees and also insulate them when in action. Increasing litigation is the order of the day. A legal cell has to be developed to tackle on a ‘a priori’ basis the problems that are likely to arise so that the employees are well protected and also enlightened on the relevant legal aspects.

The fourth estate is having an increasing access to various activities on the campus. If a common communication platform can be evolved between the University and the fourth estate, it is possible to develop a proactive positive public relations programme based on verifiable facts. This will possibly clamp the access to data from fifth columnists and also dispense with the need to react to unilaterally released unverified information.

(I) If the process of decentralisation is initiated and successfully monitored, the resources, initiative and capabilities of the ‘PEOPLE’ in the organisation can be fully tapped to subserve the cause of the ‘ALMA MATER’ and promote the greatest good of the greatest number.