

THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS OF PAKISTAN	
EXAMINERS' COMMENTS	
SUBJECT Business Communication and Behavioural Studies	SESSION Intermediate Examination – Autumn 2013

General

The performance in this paper was far below the expectations. It appears that the students do not devote adequate time and effort in their preparations for the examinations. Preparations based on a limited number of selective topics, inability to comprehend and develop understanding of the core concepts of the various topics and their applications are responsible for less than satisfactory performance. It is also observed in many instances that students do not make sufficient efforts to understand fully the essential requirements of the questions with the result that the replies are framed with a hit-or-miss approach which prevents them from scoring high marks. Limited vocabulary and poorly constructed sentences which do not express one's ideas with clarity were apparent in many cases which impaired the prospects of earning high marks.

Comments on the replies to individual questions are given below:

- Q.1 (a) Replies to the question pertaining to Matrix organisational structure were quite satisfactory. Essential ingredients of this type of organisational structure are that it is modified for the purpose of completion of a specific project and combines two types of departmentalization. Individuals from various functional departments are grouped together and share specialised resources across products. It breaks the principle of unity of command as the individuals report to two supervisors.
- (b) In this question, students were required to list the key steps involved in the preparation of a formal report on the reorganisation and restructuring of the departments of a company in the capacity of the leader of a four member team. A very large number of the students were not able to grasp the essence of the question which manifested in scoring of very low marks. Most of the replies pertained to the options, suggestions, plans and recommendations for the restructuring of the organisation which was not asked for in the question. In fact, the question required that the team leader should discuss and plan the various steps involved in the preparation of the report for the reorganisation and restructuring of the organisation. Only few students were able to identify and list the different steps involved in the preparation of the report. These steps include articulating the purpose of the report among the team members, identification of the information required and the sources from which the information can be obtained, assigning specific responsibilities to individuals and stipulation of a time-schedule for the completion of the work. These activities should be followed by developing consensus among the team members for incorporating the type of findings in the report, chapter-wise planning and final editing of the report.

- Q.2 (a) The TV interview by a journalist with a foreign businessman whose company was considering establishing a windmill power generation venture in Pakistan was a question which called for an understanding of skills of communication besides thinking of issues which are specific to the situation of power generation in the country. The general points of obtaining information of the businessman's company, conducting the interview to obtain maximum information, engaging in critical listening and extending courtesy to the interviewee were mentioned reasonably well.
- (b) The question regarding ethics has been asked from different perspectives in the past. The replies were generally satisfactory and included guidelines to deal with situations according to policies which are fair and morally correct, take cognisance of the issues that the employees should consider in their dealings with various stakeholders, and align their personal values with those of the organisation. An important point that the code of ethics should offer guidelines to the management as well as the staff to uphold basic human rights and preserve dignity of others was generally missed.
- Q.3 Most of the students have awareness of the 7 Cs of effective communications. However, the performance in this question which required understanding of the finer points and application of knowledge of the 7 Cs of effective communication in typical business situations was very poor. Only a handful of students were able to offer even 1-2 correct answers. The expectations from the students were as follows:
- (i) In this sentence the aspect of consideration was missing. Emphasis should be on the pronoun 'you' to give prominence to the recipient and downplay of 'I'.
- (ii) The phrases 'during the period and we were able to' violate the principle of conciseness and are therefore superfluous and should have been avoided.
- (iii) The phrase 'as soon as possible' is vague and would elicit a non-committal reply. Specific date should be mentioned to receive a more definite and certain response.
- (iv) Both the sentences violate the principle of courtesy. The phrases - we cannot accept, highly confusing and rectify the poor presentation - are considered to be offensive to the recipient and required to be reworded to remove the element of rudeness and elicit a positive response.
- (v) The words 'real brains' are not acceptable in formal business use. The phrase 'one of the top positions' is vague and should be more specific to convey a definitive status.
- Q.4 Due to preparations confined to only selective topics, an overwhelming 19 per cent of the students did not attempt this compulsory question of 10 marks on Equity Theory of Motivation. Even those students who attempted this question resorted to guesswork as their knowledge was confined to vague awareness of the theory. The performance in this question was, indeed, disappointing. The students repeated the same points using different words. A number of students mentioned equality instead of equity which showed lack of serious preparations.

In essence, the Equity Theory of Motivation states that employees determine their feelings of equity by comparing their own perceived outcome/input ratio with the outcome/input ratio of other employees. If according to his/her perception the ratio of outcome/input is less in comparison with others, then the employee would be experiencing under reward inequity and will be de-motivated.

- Q.5 Replies to the letter from the Public Relations Officer of Concord School of Management Sciences to the President of Jupiter Insurance Company Limited were not up to the expected standard. Consequently, the students could not score high marks in this question which carried 11 important marks. Lack of awareness of the proper format of business letters was observed in many instances. Limited and inappropriate vocabulary, spelling errors, poor construction of sentences, tense inconsistencies and errors of punctuations were apparent in a large number of replies. Moreover, some of the reasons for not acceding to the request, e.g. recruitment of excessive personnel in the recent past and poor economic conditions prevailing in the country were inappropriate.
- Q.6 (a) Replies to the question on Agenda were generally satisfactory. However, a number of students discussed the various items which are included in an agenda; this was not asked for in the question.
- (b) The answers pertaining to the importance of minute books and advantages of & conciseness in business communications were well-focused and enabled the students to score good marks.
- (c) students to score good marks.
- Q.7 This scenario-based optional question on advantages of implementation of a formal goal setting system in a manufacturing environment was designed to ascertain the level of understanding of the advantages which would be obtained by pursuing such a system. About 50% of the students chose to attempt this optional question. Most students offered wavered replies based on general awareness of the concept. Matters such as implementing a self-correcting mechanism in the execution of the manufacturing process, ascertaining areas of work skill deficiencies, identifying performance slippages, taking timely corrective actions, promoting team efforts both within the departments and also in the entire organization were missing from most of the replies. Only a limited number of students were able to achieve passing grades in this question.
- Q.8 Only 35 per cent of the students attempted this optional question on Fiedler's Contingency Model of Leadership Effectiveness. However, those students who attempted this question were aware of the styles of Psychologically Distant Managers (PDM) and Psychologically Close Managers (PCM) and the situations in which each of these leadership styles would yield optimal results. These students were able to obtain fair marks.

- Q.9 (a) This question required identification of errors of perception in interpersonal communications which often give rise to misunderstandings and result in incorrect decisions. Errors of perception in interpersonal communications include reaching decisions on the basis of incomplete information, using past information instead of the most recent information, categorisation of an individual subject on the basis of cultural traits and professional backgrounds and imposing one's own preferences and biases on others to influence them in a manner one wants to see them. A significant number of the replies did cover the above matters with varying degrees of emphasis.
- (b) The characteristics of grapevine network of communications, viz. it is mostly oral and fast, flows in all directions and is generally people-oriented were mentioned by a large number of students. Students also mentioned that grapevine network is more prevalent when the formal communication channels are weak or when the management chooses to withhold information. The students were able to identify most of these points and scored good marks.
- Q.10 A significant number of students attempted this question regarding planning of important business messages before their communication. Important steps like identification of the purpose of the message, analysis of the audience, selection and justification of the ideas and organization of the message were mentioned by the students. However, in most of the replies, the answers lacked perfection and did not elucidate the various steps completely.
- Q.11 (a) In this question students were asked to state the reasons why a culture of excessive reliance on written communications is not always the most suitable mode of communication in organisational settings. Most of the replies mentioned that written communication is time consuming and expensive, it is unable to convey feelings and emotions and may not be interpreted by the recipient in the manner as envisaged by the sender. The point that written communication can be manipulated by the recipient at a subsequent stage to the detriment of the interest of the sender was mentioned by very few students. Some of the students drew comparisons between written communication and oral communication - this was not required. A few students incorrectly mentioned the advantages of oral communications on the wrongful assumption that oral communication should be preferred to written communication.
- (b) In this question regarding the differences in the presentation and structure of informal short reports and formal long business reports, a number of students were able to respond with correct replies. An informal short business report contains only a title page followed by the report, places less emphasis in presentation of introductory material and offers conclusions and recommendations first. A formal long business report contains title page, table of contents which is followed by a comprehensive report. The formal long business report bears a professional writing style and follows a well-laid down plan of presentation of the report.

- Q.12 (a) The question on persuasive tactics in the promotional campaign of ABC Company Limited which would draw attention and interest of the audience and elicit positive action was designed to test the degree of awareness of the principles of drafting persuasive messages. Approximately 55% of the students attempted this optional question. Points pertaining to description of the unique facilities of Fun City, identification of benefits to the readers, including concept of family entertainment and special shows by celebrities were mentioned by most of the students. Announcements of discounts for specific periods, discounts to groups and volume discounts to corporate customers, offerings of gifts and online facilities for purchase of tickets are some of the attractions which would elicit positive action were also covered in the replies. Students who had understanding of the concept of persuasive messages and awareness of the promotional tactics of holiday resorts/fun melas were able to earn high marks.
- (b) The question pertaining to the advantages which service-oriented companies seek to achieve by retaining and monitoring records of telephone conversations between their officials and their customers elicited satisfactory replies. Keeping of verifiable records of conversations, assessing the level of competence and skills of the officials and ensuring that the complaints are handled objectively were mentioned by most of the students. Some students could not comprehend the requirements of the question and stated the advantages of telephone conversations. The coverage of the relevant issues in this rather simple question could have been much better if the students had awareness of importance of customer satisfaction in service oriented companies.

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