Subject: Public Administration

Course: Public Administration: An Introduction

Title of the Module: Coordination

Introduction

Coordination is very important principle of an organization. The module is divided into four parts. The first part describes the meaning, significance and definition of Coordination. The second part differentiates between cooperation and coordination and defines the types and principles of coordination. The third part incorporates features, elements and techniques of coordination. The fourth part concludes by defining the approached and hindrances to coordination.

Keywords:
Cooperation, Perpetual Process, Planning, Organizational Techniques, Horizontal Relationship, Functions Structure.

Meaning

It is Henry Fayol, one of the popular thinkers of management thought who first wrote about coordination. Later the concept first appeared in a staff paper by Luther Gulick and Lyndal Urwick written for Brownlow Committee. The acronym stands for steps in the administration process: Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Co-ordination, Reporting and Budgeting. Luther Gulick in his “Notes on the Theory of Organization, as member of Brownlow Committee asks rhetorically, what is the work of the Chief Executive? What does he do?”. PSDCORCB was the answer. Thus one of the principles of POSDCORB is the Co-ordination. In a nut-shell coordination refers to all important duty of inter-relating the various parts of the work.

Co-ordination means, negatively, the removal of conflicts, working at cross purposes and overlapping from administration. In a positive sense, the aim of coordination is to secure co-operation and team work among several employees working in the organization. Further it should be noted that without coordination the goal of the organization cannot be achieved. In
addition coordination helps the organization to move consistently towards attaining the set goals of the organization. Co-ordination deals with the task of blending for the successful achievement of an objective. If a set goal has to be attained through the efforts of a group, it effects shall have to be unified in such a manner that each effort contributes the maximum to achieve the set goal. Coordination may also be considered as an essence of management.

**Significance of Coordination**

Coordination is one of the cardinal principles of organization. In the absence of coordination there will be confusion or chaos in the organization. “It is the first of principles of organization and includes within itself all other principles which are subordinate to it through which it operates” (J.D.Mooney). It is also the first principle of management as well. Coordination is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. According to Newman “It is not a separate activity but a condition that should premate all phases of administration”.1

**Definitions of Coordination**

There are several definitions of coordination and all of them centre around teamwork and harmonious blend of activity. Yet it is appropriate here, to give a few definitions of coordination by some eminent administrative/management thinkers. And it is interesting that most of them belong to structuralist approach. A few definitions are hereunder:

Coordination is “the orderly synchronization of efforts to provide the proper amount, timing directing of execution resulting in harmonious and unified actions to a stated objective”2

Coordination is “the adjustment of the parts to each other and of the movement and operation of parts in time so that each can make its maximum contribution to the product of the whole”3.

Coordination is, “a process causing disjunct elements to a concentration on a complex of forces and influence which cause the mutually independent elements to act together”.4

---

Coordination is, “the integration of the several parts into an orderly whole to achieve the purpose of undertaking”.

It is interesting to note the detailed observation of Mary Parker Follet on Co-ordination, which states coordination as the, “reciprocal relating of all factors in a situation” and goes on to amplify it as “you cannot envisage the process accurately by thinking of ‘A’ adjusting himself to ‘B’ and ‘C’ and to ‘D’. ‘A’ adjusting himself to ‘B’ and also to ‘B’influenced by ‘A’ himself……. And so on and so on. This sort of reciprocal relating, this interpretation of every part by every other part, and again by every other part as it has ben permeated by all should be the goal of all attempts at coordination”.

Another interesting but simple and brief description of coordination has been given by Sekler Hudson as “the all important duty of inter-relating the various parts of the work”.

All the definitions given above, in general, view the coordination as making arrangements so as to see that all parts of an organization pull together toward stated goals, without any duplication, without any gaps and conflicts and on time. A best examples of a fine coordination are the assembling of a watch and rowing of a boat.

**Coordination and Cooperation**

Most of the people get confused over the terminologies of coordination and cooperation. They are not one and the same, since they do not mean the same. They are different altogether. One cannot be substituted for the other. Cooperation means working together for a common purpose and voluntary action. But coordination is a process whereby the activities of each individual are consciously directed by the head of the organization towards accomplishing a major task in certain set period. It is superior to cooperation. According Terry a story about coordination goes on like the following: “consider the story of the boy who wished to take an early morning train and accordingly set his watch ahead one half hour before going to bed so that he would be sure to arise in plenty of time. Placing the watch on the table alongside his bed, the boy retired early to get sufficient rest. His father knowing his son’s desire to take the early train,

---

6 Metcalf, H C and Urwick, L., Dynamic Administration, 1947, P.P 297 H.  
7 Sekler Hudson, op.cit P.61.
went to his son’s bedroom and turned the lad’s watch up one half hour, believing this would give the boy extra time to get up and dressed. Likewise, the mother just before retiring went into the lad’s bedroom and turned his watch forward one-half hour so that he would not be rushed in the morning. As a result the lad arose one and half hour of needed sleep. Cooperation among the actions of the son, father and mother had been present but not co-ordination”. The said example makes abundantly clear the difference between coordination and cooperation.

**Types of Coordination**

Co-ordination is of four types. They are:

1. Internal which can be termed as functional;
2. External which can be termed as structural;
3. Vertical coordination;
4. Horizontal coordination.

1. Internal coordination is related to coordinating the individual duties of persons rendering service in an organization. External coordination, on the other hand, relates co-ordinating the activities of different organizational units. According to Appleby, “It (hierarchy) functions both perpendicularly and horizontally. The horizontal relationship is between units and between agencies commonly regarded as co-ordination in an effort to distinguish between coordination and administration. Coordination effected between units responsible to a single executive is coordination at the level of units, administration at the level of the executive to whom they are responsible, whereas he in turn participates in coordination with other agencies”. 9

2. External coordination varies from organization to organization i.e defence, in case of army, law and order in the matter of police and instruction of people, in case of the educational department.

The inter purpose, however, is in every case coordination i.e making the organization work harmoniously and efficiently. Again in some organization like the army, the external objective is not adhered continuously i.e in peace time, but the internal purpose- coordinated functioning of the military machine- is constantly pursued through the practices of drill, exercises, etc.

---

8 Terry op.cit, Pp.33-34.
9 Appleby op cit, Pp.71-72.
3. Vertical coordination is what exists in a department where the departmental head is called upon to coordinate the activities of all those placed below him.

4. Horizontal coordination takes place sideways. It exists between different units such as production, sales, purchase, finance and personnel etc.

**Principles of Coordination**

There are certain principles of coordination in administration/management and which are as follows:

1. **Early Introduction**

   The aspect of coordination must have to be thought of at early phase of planning and policy-making. It must be noted that at the time of preparation of plan stage mutual consultation, cooperation and give and take becomes necessary. But a plan is prepared and put into implementation without considering much needed coordination. It is impossible to supply required material, wrong allocation of duties and further it eliminates overlapping.

2. **Individual Interest vs Organisational Interest**

   It is necessary to integrate all the activities and goals of an organization so that the objectives are achieved efficiently. In the absence of coordination individuals and organisations would begin to follow their own specialized interests at the cost of the objectives of the organization. Coordination avoids difference, in approach, interest or efforts of various departments by avoiding inconsistencies department’s and individual goals by ensuring individuals see how their duties/jobs contribute to the dominant of the enterprise.

3. **Inter-dependence of Units**

   All the units in an organization are interdependent. The interdependence is of there types which are as follows:

   (a) Pooled Interdependence
Units in organization are interlinked. All such units are linked by pooled interdependence and such interdependence makes contribution to the total organisations but not directly related. In such a case the need for coordination between the organizations is minimal.

(b) Sequential Interdependence

In this type of interdependence, one organizational unit must act before the next greater coordination and it is required in sequential than in pooled interdependence, though, here, creating buffer in inventions can reduce the dependence of units.

(c) Reciprocal Interdependence

In this relationship the input of one unit becomes the output of other advice versa.

The Need for Coordination

The necessity for coordination arises from the neutral behavior/tendency of the employees/workers of any large group, when left to themselves to drift away in different directions which give rise to conflicts. There are three reasons for such conflicts and they are as follows:

Firstly the conflicts or overlapping in the activities of the organization from the employees may occur on account of ignorance of each other’s activities. One unit in the organization not knowing what is being carried out in another may unwittingly duplicate the latter’s activity or may take a decision in conflict with it.

Secondly there is tendency often witnessed among men in-charge of particular functions or activities to give so much importance to their own work as to be unmindful of the requirement of others and make inroads into other domain. Further people with such tendencies refuse to see their particular as the part and parcel of a larger whole to which is must be duly subordinated.

The third chief reason of conflicts is the greed for power and importance which the heads of organisations, more especially, the pushing and vigorous ones have. They indulge themselves in empire building i.e seeking regularly for expand the domain of their own organization by adding to it new/fresh activities which impinge on the jurisdiction of other organisations.
Essential Features of Coordination

The essential characteristic features of coordination are as follows:

(a) It is one of the principal function of management;
(b) It is a perpetual process in the organizational management. It is a never ending and continuous process in the field of management;
(c) It does not refer to individual effort. It is a group endeavor;
(d) It entails a group effort but not an individual effort;
(e) It refers to an united action to achieve the objective of the organization
(f) Its aim is to attain the mission of the organization i.e achievement of the set goals.

Elements of Coordination

There are different aspects/elements of coordination which are given in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COORDINATION</th>
<th>↑</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-operation</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Human Relations</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diagram illustrates a sequence of elements which must be built into the organization so as to enable it a working organization. You find at the top of the chart ‘coordination’ of activities of the organization. This happens to be the goal/objective. Organisation, here, means people experience tells us that high level of production to the concern of the organization which depends upon the interest and willing cooperation of both managers and workers. This happens to be the first element. The workers or personnel in the organization should be led by the objectives which they accept as justified, fair and worthy to all concerned. This is the second element in sequence. This phenomenon leads to ‘Human Relations’ as the third element in order of sequence. It has been proved time and again that application of good human relations pays off
through co-operative coordination leading to greater productivity. Again good human relations always depend upon understanding. All the members belonging to various cadres in hierarchy of the organization must understand the goals of the organization as a whole. It must be noted, here, that the goals of the organization are common to one and all. All this is not done in isolation but the activities are carried out with understanding of inter relationship among specific tasks and the significance of any are job to the total product and to the organisation. It is also necessary that there must be perfect understanding among the people/personnel and for this there must be effective communication among them. There should be frequent exchange of ideas through talks and discussions among the people in the organization which certainly remove their differences, avoid conflicts and ultimately that situation leads to discover common goals. All this happens because of better ‘understanding’ prevailing in the organization.

**Techniques of Coordination**

After having come to know several aspects of coordination, it is pertinent to know how the coordination is achieved. Mary Parker Follet, a renowned management thinker in her discussion on coordination has given several primary principals on how to attain it. The thinker presents the following aspects about attaining the coordination:

a. Coordination can be attained by the direct contact among the responsible persons in the organization. She is of the opinion that coordination can be easily attained by direct inter-personal horizontal relationships and also by direct personal communications, thereby bringing about agreement on methods, actions and ultimate achievement of the objectives;

b. Coordination could be achieved in the early stages of planning and policy-making;

c. Coordination, as is well known, is a continuous process. It should go on and on all the time;

d. Coordination cannot be ordered. It should be brought about by the efforts of the head of the organization while performing his functions.

For effective achievement of coordination in an organization the following steps may be recommended:
1. **Simplified Organization:**

   It is observed that more – often-than-not, over specialization creates problems of coordination. The solution to the problem lies in foregoing some benefits of specialization by planning closely related functions and also operations under the charge of an executive who discharges his function as the coordinator. Yet another way of attaining coordination is by rearrangement of the department to bring about coordination among the various units of the organization.

2. **Harmonious Programmed and Policies:**

   Planning must have to be scientific and in such a case there is possibility of greater coordination. The plans prepared by various units of the organization shall have to entail consistency. There shall be no gaps. The heads of various wings must integrate the plans submitted by wings and they must be integrated. In such a case there are no chances of gaps or inconsistencies and there is possibility of greater coordination prevailing in the organization. Harmonious programmes and policies shall not give any scope for disintegration and there is effective coordination.

3. **Perfectly designed communication system:**

   Proper coordination requires effective communication in the organization. Preparation of plans and programmes require better communication of information and necessary adjustments. Communication channels must also be clear and apt for ensuring coordination between all the units in the organization.

4. **Voluntary cooperation:**

   There shall have to be informal contacts among the members of the organization to supplement formal communication. And for such a thing a sense of involvement must be instilled among the members. Liaison between and among the members of various units in the organization must be maintained to have close contacts to ensure coordination. The committees may be constituted for formal exchange of ideas, views and also suggestions.
5. **Coordination through supervision:**

Various heads of the units in the organization acting as supervisors can coordinate the work of their subordinates. Where there is heavy work load waiting for the chief of the organization, the assistance of “staff assistance” may be utilized to bring meaningful harmony and coordination.

6. **Coordination through Planning:**

Planning is also a sort of device to attain the coordination. Planning entails maximum utilization of all the resources in means, money and material (3M) only to achieve the set goals or planned targets within a determined period. This can be termed as device to attain the coordination.

7. **Organisational techniques:**

There are organizational methods or institutionalization of coordination techniques. Such techniques are: committees, conferences, meetings, seminars, panels, symposia, inter-departmental meetings, staff units, coordinating officers. Further hierarchy is also a method to attain coordination since it ensures all activities take place as per the arrangements made by the heads of the units and the head of the organization: To be more specific the organization chief is a device to achieve coordination. As regards to India, the Union Government is at the apex a coordinating agency. Apart from this, Cabinet, Council of Ministries, Secretariat, Planning Commission, Zonal Councils, The National Development Council and the Prime Minister are all engaged in the activities to attain coordination. In the same way the state, district and panchayats are all busy in attaining coordination.

8. **Standardization of Procedures and Methods:**

Procedures laid down in the organization and the people working in it discharge repetitive functions which are considered as standardized. Forms are one of the best examples of standardization of procedures. Manuals, rules and regulations may also be cited as device to achieve coordination.
9. Centralized House-Keeping

“In administration house-keeping problems usually included supply, warehousing, the cleaning and maintenance of building, printing, duplicating equipment control, central mailing, transportation and food and telephone services”.\(^\text{10}\)

Approaches to Coordination

The following discussion enlightens approaches to coordination:

System Approach

The system’s approach considers the organization on a system composed of a set of interrelated and thus mutually dependent-sub systems. That way the organization comprised of parts linking processes and goals. System approach achieves better coordination in the organization. What is a system? Ludwig Von Bertalanfly evolved the concept of systems approach. He was of the opinion that a living organism should not be looked upon as merely a conglomeration of separate elements but a definite system, possessing organization and wholeness and on which is an attempt to look at the organized whole. Organisation is a system of great complexity, comprised as it is of men, machines, materials, money among other things. It is also a dynamic interplay with its environment and clientele, competitors, business organisations and several other agencies. Systems approach is a better way of thinking about a task or job of managing or administering. It certainly provides a framework for visualizing internal and external environment factors as an integrated whole. It can keep the administrators aware of the big or whole picture- they cannot lose sight of the overall objectives of the activities and role of their particular work in even larger systems. Systems engineering is in fact, nothing but modeling and designing for overall optimization. A system’s scientists preview is the whole. He is concerned with a gestalt or general model which integrates all the parts meaningfully. Peter F Drucker, an eminent thinker on management is of the opinion that since the days of Plato, a philosopher, the definition of the good society has been to make the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts and this is precisely what system’s approach derives at.

\(^{10}\)Pfiffener and Presthem, opcit, P.184.
The employees/workers in an organization should transform technology into a meaningful tool in the hands of the former. This system is based on the ground that every organization comprised of the people, the technical system and also the environment. The people (social system) use the tools, techniques and knowledge (the technical system) to produce goods and service value by consumers or users (who are part of the external environment). Thus an equilibrium among the social system, the technical system and the environment is essential to make the organization more effective and meaningful. All the above states aspects shall have to be well coordinated to achieve the set goal.

Various modern writers of management like Phillip Sleznick Lawrence and others state that the situational approach is based on the premise that those cannot be universal guide lines which are congenial or suitable for all contingencies or situations. Each situation differs and demands different action. There cannot be one approach to all situations it is quite difficult to achieve coordination and ultimately the set goal. The organizational systems are interrelated with the environment. The contingency approach suggests that different environs needed different. Organisational relationships for maximum or optimal effectiveness, taking into consideration various factors like legal, social, political, technical and also economic factors since these aspects take the organization a long way to achieve the goal. Therefore achieving coordination much heavily depends on situations in the organization and its environment.

The organization consists of groups. Coordination can be achieved by all concerned groups in the organization. Coordination helps to a great extent the attainment of a group through getting a balance among and a smooth blending of the necessary part’s activities, encouraging group’s participation in the beginning of administration’s planning and also winning acceptance of the group’s goal from each and every member.

Hindrances to coordination, according to Luther Gullick arise from the following:

(a) Uncertainty of the future. This is with regard to the behaviour of individuals and the people at large;

(b) The lack of knowledge, experience, wisdom and character among the leaders and their confused and conflicting ideas and objectives;
(c) A vast number of variables involved and the incompleteness of human knowledge about man and life;
(d) The lack of administrative skills and techniques;
(e) The lack of orderly methods of developing, considering, perfecting and adopting new ideas, and programmes.\textsuperscript{11}