

**THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS OF PAKISTAN**

**EXAMINERS' COMMENTS**

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<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>SESSION</b>
Business Communication and Behavioural Studies	Intermediate Examination – Autumn 2008

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In spite of the viewpoint expressed by most of the examiners that the Paper was quite simple, the overall results were not satisfactory. It would appear that inadequate preparations, focus of studies to a limited number of selected topics, lack of clarity of basic concepts and their applications, cumulatively contributed towards the less-than-satisfactory performance. More intense efforts and serious preparations are essential to bring about any perceptible improvement in the results. Comments on the question-wise performance are given below.

Q.1 Although it is widely understood that a business meeting is a gathering of two or more persons, who have common interests, objectives or problems, for a purposeful exchange of views or transactions, a number of students were not able to explain this in a lucid manner. The principal reasons for convening a business meeting are to exchange ideas, announce new policies, answer questions, clarify and solve problems and motivate employees.

The essential steps for convening a successful business meeting are i) identifying the objectives of the meeting, ii) including only those persons who are directly concerned with the goals of the meeting, iii) selecting a suitable date, time and place for the meeting and informing all the participants, iv) preparing an agenda of the meeting and its distribution to the participants and v) assigning roles of leader, facilitator, recorder, etc. Some of the students mentioned the steps taken subsequent to the holding of a meeting which were not required. The performance in this question was reasonably satisfactory.

Q.2 (a) The replies to the question on Organization Culture were quite up to the mark. Organizational Culture is a basic concept of organizational behaviour and signifies a pattern of shared attitudes, beliefs, values and norms of an organization which are distinct and apparent in the behaviour patterns of individuals and groups in the organization. The organizational culture is all-embracing and fully imbibed by the employees in all cadres.

(b) Replies to the question on decision making styles of leadership viz autocratic or tells, consultative or sells, group or democratic and delegated or laissez faire along with their explanations were reasonably satisfactory.

- Q.3 In this question, brief explanations of the concepts of Information Overload, Horizontal Communication, Filtering of Information, Selective Perception and Semantic Noise were required.

The explanations of concepts other than Information Overload and Horizontal Communication were not satisfactory.

**Filtering of Information** refers to the sender's deliberate suppression or manipulation of information so that it may be seen in a more favourable perspective by the receiver. It includes concealment of information which may not be in accordance with the expectations or viewpoints of the receiver. Quite a number of students offered ambiguous explanations and were not able to appreciate the difference between Filtering of Information and Selective Perception.

**Selective Perception** is, in fact, a process by which only those characteristics which make an object, person or event stand out are perceived and since the recipient is unable to assimilate all the stimuli, he selects only those stimuli which match with his interest, experience, background and attitude to confirm his viewpoint.

**Semantic Noise** is the interference in delivery of message on account of differences in language or social and educational backgrounds. It prevents the receiver from accurately comprehending the message of the sender. Excessive use of jargon and complex words which are not understood by the receiver are also an obstacle to the delivery of accurate message.

- Q.4 The replies to this question on inherent shortcomings of a bureaucratic style of management covered most of the important points with varying degrees of emphasis. Since each point had an allocation of one and a half marks, it was expected that the students would offer a very brief remark on each of the shortcomings which would have enabled them to score optimal marks. This was not done in a number of the replies.

The well-formulated replies were expected to have addressed the shortcomings of bureaucratic style of management on the following lines:

- (i) There is excessive reliance on rules and procedures, paperwork and record-keeping which is considered to be more important than achieving of tangible results for the organization.
- (ii) The management at all levels attaches considerable significance to designations, status symbols and adherence to protocol.
- (iii) Work flexibility is compromised and individual initiative is stifled due to excessive reliance on rules and procedures.
- (iv) Strict adherence to roles and responsibilities in the organization leads to highly officious attitudes and a tendency to conceal internal administrative procedures, from colleagues and outsiders permeates throughout the organization.
- (v) Excessive bureaucratic style of management results in strong resistance to change.

- Q.5 The answers to this question on advantages of formal goal setting system in a company were rather vague and most of the replies revolved around the concepts of team-building and clear-cut demarcation of responsibilities and duties amongst the various departments. The other notable advantages were often ignored. These include i) strengthening of relationship between the departmental head and subordinates ii) prompt rectification of workers' deficiencies by adopting needs-oriented training programs iii) corrective measures for slippages in performance, if any, are instituted quickly iv) individuals know in advance the basis of their performance appraisal v) achievement of greater departmental coordination leading to achievement of overall organizational goals and vi) close monitoring of changes in marketing trends and adoption of changes.
- Q.6 In this question, the students were required to list the essential components of the communication process. These components are: sender, encoding, message, medium, receiver and feedback. Most of the replies to this question were on target, which enabled the students to obtain full marks.
- Q.7 (a) The students were required to list the circumstances in which the written, oral and electronic media are most appropriate forms of communication. Generally, the replies were satisfactory and a number of the students were able to score high marks. The circumstances and situations are listed below:

**Written Media** is used when:

- immediate feedback is not required
- message is detailed and complex and requires careful planning
- permanent and verifiable record is required
- target audience is large and dispersed
- immediate interaction with target audience is not important or necessary.

**Oral Media** is used when:

- immediate feedback is required
- message is straightforward and easy to accept
- audience can be assembled conveniently and economically
- interaction or group input is important and observance of body language or tone of response of audience would contribute towards better communication
- permanent and verifiable records are not required.

**Electronic Media** is used when:

- speed of transmission of message is important
- sender and receiver are located in different time zones
- dispersed audience has to be reached personally
- the electronic media is more cost-effective.

- (b) The answers to this question were expected to state that good communication skills mean the ability to effectively transfer and exchange information that leads to better understanding between the sender and the recipient(s). Most of the replies were on the same lines.

- (c) In this question the candidates were required to identify five practical situations of their choice and then identify the types of communication skills that would be most relevant in those situations. One example of each, is given below:

Preparation of important business letters, office memorandum or formal report	Writing skills
Explaining corporate policies to a large audience	Public speaking skills
Handling complaints from an important customer	Listening skills
Meetings with customers, suppliers, workers union	Non-verbal communication skills in observing body language and other non-verbal skills.
Meeting of Board of Directors	Face-to-face conversation skills

The performance was average as many students wrote same type of situation in more than one cases. For example a student wrote preparation of business letters, report and memos as three different situations.

- Q.8 The students were generally able to explain the term "Job Stress" satisfactorily as most of the replies were on the following lines:

Stress describes feelings of tension or exhaustion usually associated with excessive or overly demanding work. Furthermore, stress results from demands made on an individual's physical and mental energies besides monotony, feelings of failure or insecurity.

However, while explaining the three factors of stress some students wrote very lengthy descriptions without realizing that it was only an eight mark question. In fact only brief descriptions were expected, as given below:

**Environmental Factors:** High rate of inflation, shrinking economy and job uncertainty, shortages of essential commodities, law and order problems, political changes, pollution and environmental hazards.

**Organizational Factors:** Unhealthy working conditions, work-related hazards, excessive noise, extreme pressure to perform, role conflicts and ambiguities, unsatisfactory or hostile interpersonal relations with supervisors, colleagues and subordinates.

**Personal Factors:** Poor health, marital problems, undisciplined children, death of close relative or friend, disparity between income and expenses, worrisome legal disputes.

- Q.9 (a) This question on good listening skills carried a total of 10 marks. Replies to Part (a) of the question were reasonably good and the main points of paying close attention to the speaker, avoiding distractions, listening to the substance of what the speaker is saying, understanding speaker's facial expressions, body language and feelings, seeking clarifications at appropriate times without causing disruptions to the speaker's thought flow process, were adequately covered.

- (b) The performance in this question on rules of etiquette to be observed in e-mail messages was quiet poor. Most of the students were unable to refer to important points such as:
- Messages should be short and sent separately on each topic to facilitate the receiver to store them in individual mail-boxes.
  - These should be sent only to the concerned recipients and replies to particular messages should contain only the necessary extracts of the original message rather than reproducing the entire message.
  - Angry or highly contentious issues should not be communicated by email.
  - Use of capital letters should be done sparingly.

Q.10 It was observed, with considerable surprise, that the performance on the question concerning Resumes was most disappointing. This topic is of considerable importance not only from Human Resources Management viewpoint but also in the students' job search endeavours. In fact, 30 per cent of the students did not even attempt this question.

The students were expected to answer on the following lines:

- (a) **The attributes of a well-prepared resume**
- should be absolutely business like and carry a professional style
  - should highlight the applicant's special talents, qualifications and suitability for the position
  - should have an easy to read style and contain verifiable and correct information
  - use of action verbs and quantifiable indicators of achievements should be encouraged
  - use of pronoun "I" should be avoided
  - superior quality paper and a good printer should be used.
- (b) **In a chronological-format resume**, job-by-job work history is listed in a date-wise order in a prominent position immediately after the name and address of the applicant. In the functional-format resume, the emphasis is on the candidate's work skills, capabilities and achievements which are placed immediately after the name and address of the applicant. The previous work history and qualifications are relegated to a secondary position.
- (c) **Chronological-format resume** is suitable in situations when the applicant has a track record of previous employment with reputable organizations, and the proposed job entails experience with organizations having competitive advantages in more or less similar lines of business.

Functional-format resumes are more suitable when the special technical skills of the applicants match closely with the specific requirements of the position for which employment is sought and in situations where the candidate has changed jobs frequently or there are gaps in the employment record.

Even among those students who attempted this question, only a nominal proportion were able to obtain passing grades. It appears that the students had not devoted efforts to the study of this important topic.

- Q.11 The writing of a persuasive Letter to the Editor of Newspapers once again showed an inadequate grasp of vocabulary, grammar and the inability to express one's thoughts in a lucid and clear manner. Although the format was correct in most of the cases, there were instances in which the students were not able to differentiate between a Letter to the Editor and a Press Release. Since writing of letters is a regular feature of this Paper, it would be in the student's interest to acquire these skills.

*(THE END)*