

THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS OF PAKISTAN

EXAMINERS' COMMENTS

SUBJECT	SESSION
Business Communication and Behavioural Studies	Intermediate Examination – Spring 2008

A substantial number of the students were not able to present relevant and focused responses to several questions in the Paper. Consequently, the performance was much below expectations. It is apparent that these students had not made adequate preparations to meet the demands of the Paper at this level. In the questions which were designed to assess the depth of understanding and application of the important concepts, the performance was most disappointing. More intensive preparations and clear understanding of the important concepts are essential for achieving better results.

The question-wise comments on the performance are presented below:

- Q.1 A number of students were unable to comprehend the essence of this question which called for identification of the impact of higher increments given to the specialists as compared to the supporting staff, on the motivation and performance of the supporting staff and the level of team work between the supporting staff and the specialists. These students missed the core point of the question and incorrectly stated that the increment of 10 per cent to the supporting staff was in line with the rate of inflation and would therefore give an impetus to their efforts and result in improvement in the quality of services to the patients.

Quite a number of the students offered ambiguous replies with reference to Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs and factors which contribute towards improvements in levels of motivation. In fact, the replies should have focused on the vital points of financial rewards being a means of meeting diversified needs and therefore creating a perception of less important status among the supporting staff, erosion in their level of commitment and dedication and weakening of team effort between the specialists and the supporting staff leading to friction and deterioration in the quality of patient-care services provided by the hospital. An important point that was missed by most students was that employee turnover would be more pronounced among the more talented cadre of the supporting staff.

- Q.2 The performance in this question was satisfactory. The distinctive characteristic of a formal group i.e. it is formed deliberately by the management to achieve a defined purpose was stated by several students. The formation of an informal group by individuals in an organization who have some affinity for each other was also mentioned by the students.

The qualitative indicators of an Effective Work Group include high degree of commitment towards achievement of goals, greater cohesiveness and understanding among the members, better communication and appreciation of the roles of individuals and generation of new ideas. The traits observed in Ineffective Work Groups are criticism of each other's work, domination by certain members, passive acceptance of decisions, less commitment and highly assertive role of the leader to achieve results. The above attributes of effective and ineffective work groups were mentioned by relatively less number of candidates.

Some candidates narrated the positive attributes of an Effective Work Group and just listed their opposite versions for Ineffective Work Groups and consequently lost valuable marks.

Q.3 The replies to this question regarding factors which contribute towards improved receptivity of the message by the intended recipient, ought to have addressed the following key points:

- mutual sharing of aims and objectives and appreciation of viewpoints of the sender and the recipient
- relevance of message to the receiver's needs and interests
- confirmation and endorsement of recipient's attitudes and beliefs
- status, authority and credibility of the source of the message
- clarity and ease of understanding of the message and positive impact on the recipient's own attitude

Only few students were able to understand the requirements of this question and offer meaningful replies. Most students were not able to comprehend the precise requirements and enumerated the attributes of listening skills, asking questions and providing feedback, besides highlighting the barriers of communications.

Q.4 The question concerning drafting of an effective letter to pacify an irate customer carried 12 valuable marks and provided an opportunity to improve the overall grades. However, once again, lack of awareness of the layout of a formal letter, weak expressions and inadequate vocabulary were observed in most of the replies. A large number of replies commenced with the jargon.... Thank you for your letter...and stated formation of committees to conduct enquiries into the cause of the mishap, besides dismissal of the negligent driver and his staff. The well drafted replies were those which readily accepted the responsibility for the mishap, offered immediate compensation, expressed sincere regrets for the inconvenience caused to the customer and requested the customer for his continued patronage. Such candidates also adhered to the format of a formal business letter and were able to score high marks.

Q.5 (a) The replies to the question concerning reasons for pursuance of formal and impersonal style in all external and internal forms of business communications were generally satisfactory. The reasons for adoption of the formal style in large and complex business organizations include:

- upholding of authority to ensure respect for the superiors

- observance of impartiality and objectivity in exercise of decisions on contentious issues
- maintenance and enhancement of corporate image
- effectiveness in all business communications
- compliance with mandatory legal and business regulations
- appropriate record keeping for evidence and administrative purposes

A number of the students were able to identify 3-4 of the aforesaid points and scored fair marks

- (b) Understandably, there were marked variations in the responses to the "inappropriate statements" mentioned in the question. Most of the students were able to identify the shortcomings in the statements and come up with satisfactory answers.

In part (ii) regarding the failure to supply the Product Code and inability to fulfill the order in the absence of the Product Code, the replies generally showed lack of courtesy, whereas the seller in normal circumstances, is always keen to attract more business and facilitates compliance of the orders received from the customers.

The part of the question relating to the 7Cs of Business Communications generally elicited satisfactory replies.

- Q.6 In this question only the Headings of the Parts of a Formal Report were required. These different headings in a typical Formal Report are:

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|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ▪ Title Page | ▪ Letter of Transmittal |
| ▪ Table of Contents | ▪ Executive Summary |
| ▪ Introduction /Preamble | ▪ Scope of Study |
| ▪ Methodology of Study | ▪ Findings of the Study |
| ▪ Conclusions/Recommendations | ▪ Appendixes or Appendices |

In spite of the specific instructions, several students offered brief explanations under various headings and consequently lost precious time.

- Q.7 Although there are numerous definitions of leadership, marks were given for definitions which highlighted the essential ingredients of leadership viz (i) that it entails alignment of people (ii) towards achievement of common goals and (iii) empowers them to take actions to reach these goals.

The leadership skills which are vital for achieving success in global operations are communication skills, creativity, human resources development skills, self-learning and professional competence. Several students were not able to discern between leadership skills and characteristics/traits of leadership. However, the overall performance in this question was satisfactory.

Q.8 A significant number of the students seemed well prepared for the question relating to indirect approaches of communication. The basic steps of indirect communications i.e. use of a buffer or safety valve to begin the message on a positive note, offering of explanation or analysis for the decision as it is different from the expectations of the recipient, placement of the bad news message in the middle of the paragraph and offering of constructive alternative suggestions, wherever possible, were mentioned by most of the students. The vital point that the letter should conclude on a positive note to retain the recipient's goodwill was mentioned in almost all the replies.

Q.9 Barring a few exceptions, the replies were quite below the mark. Vague and rambling replies lacking insight in the concepts were observed in a number of instances.

Perception: precise explanation of Perception is that it is a unique process by which an individual sees, organizes and interprets other persons, ideas and things in terms of his own beliefs, values and expectations. Few replies covered these essential points. The noteworthy point that perceptions of individuals at times are different from the real situations was mentioned by very few students.

Job Satisfaction: Job Satisfaction is the attitude and feelings an individual has towards his job. Job satisfaction is affected by rewards, recognition, quality of supervision and social relationships among the work groups. A number of answers contained irrelevant references to job rotation, job enrichment and empowerment and theories of motivation.

Total Quality Management (TQM): TQM permeates all spheres of the organization and entails continuous improvements in quality, productivity and effectiveness obtained through management responsibility for processes, productivity and quality in the entire organization. Generally, the replies were vague and lacked clear understanding of the concept.

Organizational Culture: The performance here was better. In most of the replies, the essential ingredients of organizational culture viz. shared values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes which prevail in an organization were mentioned.

Q.10 The performance in this question on feedback was quite good. Feedback can be obtained from trainees by i) asking them to prepare a summary of the main points covered in the presentation, ii) expressing opinion about the effectiveness of the lecture, iii) relevance of the key points in the lecture with the actual work in the bank and iv) offering group-wise critique on the efficacy of the lecture. These points were adequately mentioned by a significant number of the students.

Q.11 This question was not fully understood by a number of the students. Off-the-cuff remarks relating to lack of in-depth knowledge of the subject, being camera-shy and the weaknesses of the interviewers were mentioned in a number of the replies. However, the common traits of weak communication skills observed amongst the interviewees are; being over-talkative, frequent interruption of the moderator, excessive criticism of other participants, aggressive posturing and display of indifferent attitude when the moderator or other members are speaking. Very few replies adequately covered these points.

(THE END)