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Communication Climate- Does It Relates to the Efforts to Assure Quality in Higher Education Institutions?

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The study aimed to explore the relationship between communication climate and quality assurance practices in higher education institutions in Pakistan. In this regard an attempt was made to measure the difference between communication climates of high and low- ranked universities of Pakistan. 5 public and 3 private sector high ranked universities and 5public and 3private sector low ranked universities were selected as the sample clusters. At second stage, 500 faculty members from selected universities were taken as sample by using simple random sampling technique. Data analysis revealed that the on the whole high ranked universities were having more supportive communication climate and defensive communication climate was found commonly prevailing in low ranked universities. Examining the relationship between communication climate and quality assurance provides a valuable addition in the available literature. It also offers new insights into how quality assurance approaches and efforts can be made fruitful in higher Education institutions in Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Across the globe higher education sector is facing numerous challenges stemmed from globalization and internationalization. Particularly the last two decades demonstrated increased demand for tertiary education, technological advancement, emergence of knowledge economy, and higheraspirations of stakeholders along with the competition at national and international level, resulting in transformation of higher education institutions (Damme, 2001; Abukari and Corner, 2010).Kheradia (2011) support these views by elaborating that:

'The concept of "Quality" with a Big "Q" was an offshoot of the growing quality crisisof the 1980s,

when "quality" (with a small "q" that was solely restricted to manufacturegoods) acquired a broader…meaning.' (p, 403)

Hence, no institution of higher education today can dare to ignore quality concerns as for long time survival and competitiveness of the higher education institutions; it has become inevitable for them to reexamine quality of their services, redefine their policies and practices and to measure satisfaction level of their customers. Though quality was and will always be very important for the institutions of higher education like all the other organizations but its significance in present era has

become crystal clear as discussed by Vroeijenstijn (1995) cited in Newton (2007):

> 'The concept of quality is not new: it has always been part of the academic tradition. It is the outside world that now emphasizes the need for attention to quality. It is the relationship between higher education and society which has changed.' (p.14)

Major forces behind increased focus on quality are explosive advancement in science and technology, and increased international competitions. Law (2010) argues that the subject of Quality Assurance in higher education has attained a special focus throughout the world because of the increasing demands for this sector to meet the challenges of globalization and to respond to ever-changing aspirations and expectations of the communities regarding their development into new knowledge-based societies.

Problem of quality starts with the efforts to conceptualize it. Education services being intangible are not as easily measureable as it sounds to be and outcome of the education is in form of the transformation in knowledge, characteristics, skills and behavior of the individuals (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis and Fitsilis, 2010). Therefore, despite the fact that there is an enormous volume of literature in form of research articles and published books is available and addition to this volume is being made with every passing movement, no universally accepted definition of quality that can be applied specifically to the sector of higher education is there. While attempting to find the definition of quality in higher education Scott (1994) cited in Newton (2007) had to admit that: '*No authoritative definition of quality in higher education is possible*' (p.14). Newton (2007) also cited McConville, (1999) and Green (1994) who described quality as a philosophical concept and believed that no definition of the term quality exists; *you only know it when you find it*! Tam (2001) as cited in Harvey and Willium (2010), observed quality as a highly contested phenomenon; having multiple meanings, on the basis of how higher education is perceived. So it is to note here that despite the growing concern and common commitment of higher education institutions across the world to assure quality, quality as a concept is multi faceted; contextual and value-laden and is, therefore still frequently misunderstood, misinterpreted and misrepresented by many of the academics (Doherty,2008, cited in Tsinidou et al, 2010, Law,2010).

Though quality as a concept in the context of higher education is complex and its specification; assurance and enhancement are often considered as problematic but in fact there is a consensus upon the view that quality assurance has acquired central place in context of current educational reforms, in present-day educational terminology concept of quality is considered as one of the most used and fashionable concepts regardless the fact that institutions and stakeholders of higher education vary in terms of defining quality and the possible approaches and means to assure quality (Zavelys, 2005). There is a range of the factors discussed by Coates, (2005) to stimulate and maintain the wave of quality and its assurance in higher education scenario. Students require exact information about educational quality to be able to decide between different courses and institutions. Sufficient information is also needed by academics and institutional administrators to enable them to monitor and improve the practices and policies as well as the courses and programs. Institutions want necessary information about their quality to benchmark and promote their performance. Along with these parties Governments and other national and international agencies call for the authentic and sufficient information for getting assistance in deciding about funding, accountability and policy formulation. Due to these and many other factors, '*quality assurance has become part of the fabric of many higher education systems*' (p.25).Commission of the European Communities, (2009)pointed out that globalization, integration of economies and increased professional and academic mobility, necessitate the recognition of credentials across the countries. The "borderless" system of higher education has made quality assurance even more important.

Boyle & Bowden (1997) argued that quality assurance in the context of higher education is unique. In this regard they quoted the definition of quality assurance as proposed by Boyle, (1994) as:

> 'In the context of further and higher education, quality assurance can be viewed as the ongoing development and implementation of an ethos, policies and processes which aim to maintain and enhance quality, as defined by articulated values, plans, goals and stakeholders' needs.' (p. 17)

Kettunen, (2008) argues that Quality Assurance (QA) refers to a holistic approach aiming to provide a philosophical and theoretical framework for the improvement of higher education institutions. He quotes the definition of quality assurance proposed by Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, according to this definition term quality assurance encapsulates all the processes, procedures and systems employed by the institutions of higher education to safeguard and enhance the quality of its programs and activities. Odhiambo, (2011) elaborated the concept of quality assurance in a comprehensive way as the systematic procedures intended to monitor and enhance quality. It provides the stakeholders with a guarantee that the programs, courses and products in form of the graduates meet defined

standards. He believes that quality assurance may be taken as an instrument for continuous improvement of the system, installing accountability and allowing compatibility with other systems of higher education.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Pakistani Perspective

The establishment of the Higher Education Commission in 2002 was the prime concrete result stemming from the work of the Task Force. As viewed by World Bank, (2010) it was in the early 2000s that the influential potential of a high quality higher educationsector initiated to be recognized by the authorities and thethreat of losing this potential due to the present alarming situation of the sector becameobvious. This dual awareness resulted in the realization of the need for radical changes, and boostedthe formation of institutions particularly the Higher Education Commission**.**

Higher Education Commission as argued by Atta-Ur-Rahman, (2008) undertook an organized process for reform delineated in the commission Medium Term Development Framework (MTDF). In this framework Access, Relevance and Quality have been recognized as the key challenges being faced by the sector. The Framework is systematized around seven strategic aims out of which four are the "core aims": (i) faculty development, (ii) access,(iii) excellence in learning and research, and (iv)relevance to the economy. It includes three cross-cutting supporting strategic aims: (i) governance and management, (ii) quality assessment and accreditation, and (iii) physical andtechnological infrastructure development (HEC, 2005, World Bank, 2010).

Higher Education Commission placed a particular focus on the quality assurance of institutions across the country in order to achieve parity with international standards and criteria of quality of higher learning. A Quality Assurance Agency was established to safeguard the interest of the public by enforcing strenuous standards of higher education and by encouraging continuous quality improvement by reviewing and settingbenchmarks and quality criteria (Atta-Ur-Rahman, 2008).

It was realized that quality assurance touches on almost every aspect of the institutional process and is much more than no of books in the library, number of facultymembers having doctorate degree and ratio of computers to students. Therefore Higher Education Commission launched a comprehensive program for quality assurance. This program has three main components:development and setting up of standards and criteria for different quality parameters in highereducation, designing of processes as well as building capacity of the institutions in order to ensure implementation of these criteria and development of a

system to of regular internal and externalmonitoring and assessment of the institutions (Azam, 2007; World Bank, 2010)

While discussing about the success of the initiatives regarding quality assurance in higher education institutions of Pakistan; views of Lim, (2009) can provide a guideline as he argued that to evaluate the applicability of quality assurance programs particularly in developing countries; three points must be taken into consideration. The first point is to identify the necessary conditions for these programs to work; the second thing is to ensure the presence of these conditions in higher education institutions, and lastly to judge that in case of the partial or total absence of these conditions what will be the status of these quality assurance programs. He argued on the basis of experiences of many universities that quality assurance programs can prove to be effective only when academics are satisfied, are equipped with research skills, receive satisfactory support and enjoy academic freedom. This debate shows that there are many factors other than the program itself that can hinder or facilitate the effectiveness of quality assurance programs. Many of these factors, discussed by Lim, (2009) are related to the psycho-social status of the academics which is directly linked to the interpersonal communication and social interactions within the institution.

Quality Assurance and Communication

Nature and level of social interaction of human in an organization gives birth to communication climate. Timm and DeTienne, (1995) stated: '*We each perceive communication climate differently but what we perceive is real (for us)*', (p.125). Communication climate is a complex phenomenon in the field of organizational communication. It is related to the perceptions of the members of an organization about communication events within that organization. These perceptions have a strong bearing upon feelings, emotions and actions of the members.

Communication climate is defined many ways. Zalabak, (2002) defined communication climate as when communication occurs between managers and employees or between employees, individuals evaluate this communication, develop beliefs about it, and these collective beliefs, expectations and values regarding communication are called communications climate. According to him communication climate is a subjective reaction to organization members' perception of communication events.

Communication climate can be considered from another angle that it is emotional "atmosphere" between speaker and audience -created by the way the speaker *addresses* his audience and vice versa (Bartels, 2006) .

Buchholz, (2001) defined communication climate as the internal environment of information exchange among people through an organization's formal and informal networks. He added that if the information flow is free there is an open communication climate in the organization and communication climate is closed when information is blocked.

According to Jack Gibb as cited in Beck(1999) communication climate lies on a continuum from defensive to supportive. Gibb expanded his discussion about climates with the help of six polarities that are: Evaluating versus Description; Control versus Problem Orientation; Neutrality versus Empathy; Strategy versus Spontaneity; Superiority versus Equality and Certainty versus Provisionalism (Beck, 1999, Wood, 2008).

Evaluation is characterized by judgments; blaming and questioning about standards, values and motives. In contrast to evaluation, *description* supports the individual and it is characterized by sharing information, presenting feelings and perceptions and encouraging participation. Beck (1999) further discussed about the results of evaluation by arguing that because of the fear of evaluation, employees may feel reluctant and hesitant to approach the manager which results in filtering information between levels of organization and consequently decisions are made based on inexact or insufficient information.

The climate of *control* is characterized by the manager's effort to influence a subordinate whereas *problem orientation* highlights mutual involvement in meeting challenges and seeking resolutions. One instance of controlling communication is the insistence of the controller (a manager in organizational setting) that his or her solutions should prevail (Wood, 2007), it is about detecting predetermined solutions to the problems (Harris and Hartman, 1992). On the other hand a problem oriented communication focuses on finding a solution that is acceptable to all parties. In this climate solutions are sought without intruding on the others goals, decisions and progress (Harris & Hartman, 1992 Bartels, 2006: Wood, 2008: Beck, 1999).

Gibb (196) cited in Beck (1999) believed that the *neutral* message demonstrates a lack of empathy or interest whereas; the empathetic message is responsive to others' feelings and thoughts. It conveys understanding and interest. Wood (2007) supports these views by saying that people become defensive if they are responded by others in a neutral or detached manner which is interpreted as a lack of regard and caring. This is a great challenge for the managers as they prefer to comment or react based on objective standards rather than personality issues. *Empathetic communication* on the other hand is based upon the respect for the worth of the employees (Harris and Hartman, 1992 cited in Bartels, 2006; Wood, 2008).

Gibb (1961) cited in Beck (1999) is of the view that *strategic* messages convey an air of deceiving or misleading on the other hand *spontaneous messages* are characterized by openness and honesty. Spontaneous communication is always open, non-manipulative and honest.

Gibb (1961) cited in Beck (1999) defined *superiority* as the messages that on one hand attempt to portray the speaker being superior to the listener and on the other hand indicate a lack of desire for the listener's feedback and input. In contrast to superiority communication *equality communication* refers to the messages that show worth in the listener and his/her contribution. These messages convey a desire for the input and feedback of the listener.

Certainty, as described by Gibb, (1961) cited in Beck (1999) refers to the messages that portray something as being absolute. The speaker in this scenario has and conveys black and white views regarding certain phenomenon leaving no room for maneuver. *Provisionalism*, on the other hand poses a view with open attitude. This refers to inviting others for exploring alternatives.

Higher Education Commission Pakistan has developed procedures and guidelines for quality assurance in the higher education institutions and the variables considered for this process are students, faculty staff, governance, infrastructure, facilities and funding. The researcher, being a part of higher education sector has personal observation that along with these variables communication climate also plays a very important role in the process of quality assurance. But this vital phenomenon is still a prey to negligence of the researchers. Little research has been done to explore the relationship between communication climate and quality of the higher education institutions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was designed to achieve the following objectives

i. To investigate the communication climate in the higher education institutions of Pakistan.
ii. To measure the difference between communication climates of high and low ranked universities of Pakistan.
iii. To find out the differences between the communication climate of public sector universities and that of private sector universities.
iv. To determine preferred communication climate with special reference to quality assurance and enhancement.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

All the 58 ranked universities constituted the population of the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. At the first stage 8 high ranked universities (5 public sectors and 3 private sectors) and 8 low ranked universities (5 public sector and 3 private sector) were selected. At the second stage faculty members and academic managers from these universities were selected randomly. For measuring communication climate through Communication Climate Inventory 500 faculty members (academicians) out of 3049 faculty members from selected universities were selected by using simple random sampling technique as representative sample. 0ut of 500 faculty members 378 participated in the study therefore the response rate was 75%.

Instrument: Communication Climate Inventory, a scientific measure of communication climate within the organization developed by Costigan and Schmeildler in 1984 was used as the instrument for data collection. This inventory was based upon 36 items constructed on 5 point Likert scale. Communication Climate inventory is based upon Gibb model of communication climate and it measures all the dimensions of communication climate. After pilot testing, inventory was administered to the sample. Scoring of the inventory was done in a way that low scores indicated higher extent of the existence of a particular communication climate in the institution.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Each of the both communication climates that are Supportive Communication Climate and Defensive Communication Climate had six factors. Differences among the mean scores of the faculty members serving in Public and Private sector high and low ranked Universities of Pakistan on each factor and the overall communication climate were measured through ANOVA. Table 1

A significant difference in mean scores of academicians from public and private sector high and low ranked universities was noted on all the six dimensions of defensive communication climate. In this regard the mean scores of the faculty members of public sector high ranked universities and private sector high ranked universities was significantly higher than the mean scores of the faculty members serving in public sector low ranked universities, and private sector low ranked universities.

The inventory was designed in a way that the higher the mean score, the lesser the existence of the

dimension of communication climate. Hence the data revealed that all the dimensions of defensive communication climate were found considerably more prevailing in low ranked universities as compared to high ranked universities of Pakistan.

Table 2 shows that a significant difference was found in the mean scores of the academicians of different universities on the basis of rank and sector, related to the six dimensions of supportive communication climate. The mean score of the academicians from public sector low ranked universities and private sector low ranked universities was significantly higher (ranging from 4.36 to 4.17) than that of the academicians serving in public sector high ranked universities and private sectors high ranked universities (ranging from 2.41-2.55).

Hence the data revealed that both public and private sector high ranked universities were having considerably higher level of supportive communication climate as compared to the climate of low ranked public sector and low ranked private sector universities of Pakistan.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The present study concluded that supportive communication climate was found to be prevailing more in high ranked universities as compared to low ranked universities. On the other hand low ranked universities were having defensive communication climate. It can be inferred here that supportive communication climate play a pivotal role in quality assurance of any organization. Adequate empirical support is there to prove the impact of communication climate upon employees and consequently upon organization. A positive correlation was demonstrated through several studies between communication climate and organizational identification, communication climate and job satisfaction and communication climate and organizational commitment as well as communication climate and positive work attitudes (Zalabak,2002, Trombetta, 1998, Costigan and Schmeidler, 2001, 1997; Smidts, Pruyn and Van Riel, 2001 cited in Bartels, 2006). Saleem, Adnan and Ambreen, (2011) argued that the effectiveness and quality of an organization is in the hands of the individuals working in it, their positive work related attitude is of prime importance in this context. It is obvious form the discussion above that communication climate of the organization will shape the work related attitude of the person and this attitude will determine the level of success or quality of an organization. If taken in the particular context of quality assurance in higher education, it is the staff, particularly the teachers, who could actualize the rhetoric of quality assurance (Biggs, 2001). He continues to argue that without staff development the dream of quality assurance can never be realized and according to him staff development for

Table 1. Significance of differences in mean scores of the faculty members serving in high and low ranked universities of Pakistan on defensive communication climate

Factors	Respective Institution	Mean	F	Sig
Evaluation	Public Sector High Ranked	4.392	406.98	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	4.095		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	2.533		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	2.579		
Control	Public Sector High Ranked	4.446	464.66	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	4.164		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	2.556		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	2.604		
Strategy	Public Sector High Ranked	4.421	557.193	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	4.145		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	2.432		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	2.453		
Neutrality	Public Sector High Ranked	4.294	165.241	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	4.192		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	2.392		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	2.357		
Superiority	Public Sector High Ranked	4.436	601.332	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	4.103		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	2.344		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	2.338		
Certainty	Public Sector High Ranked	4.042	498.824	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	4.285		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	2.506		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	2.541		

Note= the higher the score the lower is the level of defensive communication climate.

quality assurance in higher education is mainly getting teachers to teach better. For this purpose it is essential for the institution to provide proper incentives as well as support structures to make teachers enhance their performance and most importantly to contribute in quality assurance process (Biggs, 2001). The same theme was confirmed by the academic managers who participated in an informal discussion during the present study. They highlighted that for high quality academic work, a conducive and encouraging environment is the pre-requisite. If there is a relationship of share and care between the management and academicians and among the academicians themselves they would be able to concentrate more on their academic tasks and would seek peer or supervisor support in case of a problem ultimately the performance would be enhanced. One of the academic managers said:

'If the teaching and research output of a teacher are considered to be an important factor of institutional quality then you (the manager) must foster positive and supportive interpersonal relations with the teachers working under you; so that he/she feels free and encouraged to bring out and work on the innovative ideas in classrooms to improve teaching learning process and in the research field as well.'

Though he (the academic manger) did not named it but this sort of interpersonal relationship is an off spring of supportive communication climate.

While comparing the communication climate of public and private sector universities no major difference was found on the basis of sector. It is interesting to note here that Hamid Ullah, (2005), in his study on 'comparison of quality of higher education in public and private sector institutions of Pakistan,' found that though the state of art of quality and quality assurance were not satisfactory in both sectors. Management, administration, teaching, students' activities and discipline were found to be much better in private sector institutions as compared to public sector institutions. Some of these factors like management and administration are directly linked to the communication as all the management functions depend upon communication and this is through communication that management becomes visible without

Table 2: Significance of differences in the mean scores of the faculty members serving in public and private sector high and low ranked universities of Pakistan on Supportive Communication Climate

Factors	Respective Institution	Mean	F	Sig
Provisionalism	Public Sector High Ranked	2.553	385.334	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	2.496		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	4.333		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	4.295		
Empathy	Public Sector High Ranked	2.529	398.833	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	2.457		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	4.345		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	4.296		
Equality	Public Sector High Ranked	2.367	393.031	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	2.407		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	4.226		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	4.177		
Spontaneity	Public Sector High Ranked	2.545	496.909	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	2.485		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	4.364		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	4.364		
Problem orientation	Public Sector High Ranked	2.553	473.472	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	2.493		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	4.241		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	4.220		
Description	Public Sector High Ranked	2.460	449.090	0.001
	Private sector High Ranked	2.413		
	Public Sector Low Ranked	4.355		
	Private Sector Low Ranked	4.321		

Note= higher score indicates lower level of the existence of supportive communication climate

communication it is just abstraction (Beck, 1999). The present study in this regard seems to repulse that study and came out with the result that communication climate- that stems from communication between the management and the employees- was not found to be different on the basis of sector. One reason behind this might be that the regulatory body for higher education institutions both public and private is Higher Education Commission, which provides guidelines and facilitations to both sector universities to excel and be world class institutions of higher education (HEC, 2010). Being under the umbrella of same supervision, does not allow too much diversity in management and other activities of these institutions. Moreover communication climate is not something to be formally imposed or directly created rather it refers to employees' perceptions or feelings derived from overall verbal and non verbal communication and interaction experiences and observations within the organization (Zalabak, 2002; Buchholz, 2001; Bartels, 2006). If we confine the discussion to the views of Rowland and Rowland (1997) about communication climate, the conceptualization of the conclusion would be easy. They discussed elements

and nature of communication climate in the context of nursing administration but these comprehensive views are applicable to any organization. They took communication climate as the degree to which, an organization allows or more preferably promotes the open and free exchange of information in this regard three components of communication climate are there- quantity, referring to how much information is shared and for a positive communication climate the quantity of information sharing should be at least sufficient enough to make people fully understand their tasks and the contribution of their tasks in overall effectiveness of the organization. Second element is quality which refers to the accuracy and authenticity of the information being exchanged. For a communication climate to be positive reliable and accurate information should be exchanged and the third component of communication climate is the channels of communication; for a positive and healthy communication climate both vertical channels (downwards- from supervisor to the subordinates and upwards-from subordinates to supervisor) and horizontal (from peers within the department and peers outside the department) should be used. If taken into this scenario it

would have been easy to infer that the quantity; quality and channels being used for communication in both public and private sector universities were not different to a considerable extent. But communication climate as perceived and measured in the present study was much more complex and multidimensional, referring to the overall interaction patterns between supervisor/academic manager and the employees/ academicians. It is therefore appropriate to conceptualize the conclusion with the help of the views of other experts, for example Dennis, (2006) who take it as an interactive assortment of several communication concepts. Five major communication concepts or elements he believes to shape communication climate are Credibility- that refers to the perception of the amount of knowledge and expertise a person has and the consistency of its application and exhibition. High credibility results in positive communication climate and low credibility leads towards a negative communication climate. For example if the employees believes that their manager lacks credibility, the communication climate of the organization will suffer. The second element in this regard is trust which is closely related to credibility and in the words of Dennis, (2006) perceived management trust and credibility are the two major mechanisms of overall communication climate. A poor or negative communication climate is always identified with employees' low level of trust for top management. Openness which refers to both the freedom and encouragement to disclose information and opinion is an essential element of positive or supportive communication climate. On the other hand, if people are reluctant or restricted to share their feelings and opinions, the flow of important information would be constrained and negative perceptions regarding communication and interaction would prevail giving birth to a negative, poor or defensive communication climate. Rumor is another important factor of communication climate. More rumors, misrepresentation of truth tend to generate negative perceptions among people and create a hindrance in free and open communication as a result a defensive or negative communication climate is established. Another element of communication climate is rule assertiveness. Dennis argues that organizations, having and enforcing a plethora of rules are more likely to establish a negative or poor communication climate. Rule assertiveness leads towards inflexibility and dehumanization resulting in less and ultimately no creativity and individuality. Taken these views into account it can be concluded that trust, credibility, openness do not primarily belong to a specific sector that is public or private. It is worth mentioning here that rule assertiveness was found a bit more less in public sector high ranked universities showing least scores on strategy and superiority.

There may raise a misconception that communication climate does not contribute towards quality assurance of an institution rather an institution of high quality results in the establishment of a supportive communication climate. It is necessary to corroborate here that communication is the most basic activity of an institution. Even some scholars take it as the pre-requisite to establish an institution (Guffey, 1997; Fisher, 1997; King, 2007). All the other activities and processes of the institution determining its quality are the off springs of the first most activity that is communication.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Looking at the present study critically, though there are many noteworthy findings; a few ideas need to be discussed regarding the limitations and pitfalls experienced. The first and the most important point to be taken into consideration is that the data regarding variables were collected through a single source for each variable therefore, the outcomes of the study may suffer from common method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podasakoff 2003); though the common method bias is a potential liability as due to the scarcity of resources and managerial issues it was not possible to use multiple sources to obtain data or to apply multiple methods to measure the variables.

Accessibility of the sample particularly academic managers during data collection proved to be a very challenging task for the researcher. Despite the efforts it was not possible to arrange a focus group discussion of the academic managers to provide more detailed and valuable information. Had the study been patronized by Higher Education Commission, more academicians and academic managers could be contacted to bring forth more credible; authentic and generalizable results. Another serious restriction that needs to be mentioned here is the cross-sectional nature of the study. The variables of this study were measured at one time. This indicates that the present finding might represent a specific situation in time. Though the findings confirm most of the hypotheses, care must be taken while interpreting the results with regard to the causality of relationships found.

It is also worth mentioning here that as with the case of most survey researches variables were measured through self-reporting of the respondents, the results, thus, refers to the personal perceptions of the respondents and are dependent upon the extent up to which they were able to assess the reality.

Moreover, the study was limited to 8 high ranked and 8 low ranked universities of Pakistan for better understanding of the impact of communication climate as well as managerial communication styles upon quality assurance and for the results to be highly generalizable more universities need to be involved.

Despite all the limitations and considerations the

phenomenon of communication climate is very vital in the context of organizational effectiveness in general and in quality assurance in higher education in particular. Based upon the findings of the study it is recommended here that:

- As communication climate was revealed to be highly influential upon the efforts related to quality assurance at higher education level; steps be taken by the top management of higher education to enhance the awareness regarding the significance of communication climate among management and academicians in the higher education institutions

- Higher Education institutions, in response to their commitment towards quality assuranceneed to nurture an amiable and pleasantclimate in the workplace; which would support interpersonal relationship to be established and strengthen, resulting in supportive communication climate.

- It is recommended that activities regarding evaluation of communication climate be periodically conducted in order to ensure that employees' perceptions are positive regarding communication between them and the supervisor and if negative perceptions are found steps should be taken immediately to identify and address the root cause.

- As the present study is the first of its kind, it is recommended that the scope of this study be expanded to include larger sample as well as different methods to assess the communication climate and communication styles of academic managers in order to substantiate the findings.

- It is suggested for further researches to construct observational based measures along with the standardized inventories ofthe communication climates and different communication styles employed by the academic managers in universities of Pakistan to get first-hand knowledge and avoid common method bias.

- Another recommendation regarding future research is to apply an experimental setting in which communication climates are manipulated and the effects on quality assurance practices are measured.

- Some research needs to be conducted to explore the determinants of communication climate so that universities may actually modify their communication climate from

defensive to the supportive one.

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