UNIT 3 TRAINING OF NON-TEACHING SUPPORT STAFF

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

Non-teaching staff have a significant role to play in making distance education programmes and the institution a success. They have to undertake a wide range of activities related to course development, course delivery and course/programme implementation, including student support services. Junior-assistant-cum-typist, computer operators, section officers/superintendents, stenographers, personal assistants, etc., in the open/distance teaching institutions perform their functions in close collaboration with the academics. Without proper awareness and a general understanding of the distance mode of teaching-learning and a degree of sensitivity to the problems of learners, it is not possible to make distance teaching a meaningful activity. The academics, the administrators, and the non-teaching staff must work in tandem and their focus should always be on the student. There is not a single activity in an open university that can be viewed in isolation, though each category of the personnel may be engaged in different sets of activities. This being what it is, we have highlighted the important role of support staff in ensuring better servicing to our clients, particularly students. Further, we have touched upon the need for effecting change, notwithstanding some resistance, for effecting functioning of distance education system. In this unit we have also discussed the need for management information System (MIS) for the top-management to guide the staff properly and profitably. In essence, you should consider this unit as an input for drawing out a training programme for the non-teaching staff on your own and increasing their participation and commitment by involving them in different staff development activities.
3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit should provide you with an overview of the role of non-teaching/support/allied staff in distance teaching contexts and the need to train them. After going through this unit, you should be able to

- explain how non-teaching staff make a difference in servicing clients – both internal and external,
- explain the need for ‘change’ through training that will help an organisation function better,
- discuss the need for and the nuances involved in management information system and say how it contributes to effective functioning of an organisation, and
- Conduct a training programme for allied staff (keeping the above three objectives in view), when required.

3.2 ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF SUPPORT STAFF

In an open university different categories of non-teaching personnel are engaged in different sets of activities. However, there is not a single activity which can be viewed in isolation. Each activity is related to a teaching activity whether falling under programme/course development, delivery or implementation. The implication is that, the failure in one activity would adversely affect each of the related activities. In other words, a minor problem or failure in an activity or operation might lead to breakdown of the entire system. The role exposition below would make it very clear to you.

In open universities, the failure in one activity may bring to halt the gigantic wheel – the distance teaching system. Failure to carry out a minor task will stop major operations leading to demotivation of the people involved, and also make the institution vulnerable to public criticism. Imagine a situation where you have all the course materials for a one year programme except a few pages of assignments which are yet to be printed and therefore, the registered students are not sent their course materials for a few months. The whole exercise of launching/running a course will be ridiculed by the students as well as the public because of the negligence or default of a few persons. Therefore, the allied staff including top-officials should be aware of the nature of their work and the desired qualities required to do it.

Here are a few activities and patterns of behaviour expected of allied staff which have implications for major teaching functions. The trainer has to keep all these functions given below in mind and be able to impress upon the concerned their value and importance.

3.2.1 Word Processing

Distance learners primarily depend on the study materials they receive from a distance teaching institution. Since their learning is a self-directed one, the study materials must be prepared with utmost care and thoroughness. The academics take the responsibility of the content, language etc., but the technical execution of getting the materials ready in a desirable form depends on the non-teaching staff. For example, a good typist or computer operator (CO) saves the time and labour of many and thus saves the resources for the institution. If the typist or CO is careless and incompetent, academics will have problems in finalising scripts; s/he will have to repeat
the same drafts many times; there will be delays in printing the courses, dispatching them and in organizing counselling sessions for the students. One can avoid this chain reaction that affects all the operations adversely, if the typist or CO knows his/her job well, is careful and also has the required level of awareness about the system.

However, with the advancement of technology, most of the distance teaching institutions have word processors installed to accelerate the process of course development and production. Word processors facilitate course developers in a number of ways. Apart from getting the drafts ready quickly, editing the drafts is much easier if we use the word processor. Once we get the camera-ready copy from the word processor, printing also takes less time than what it would otherwise in the case of typed manuscripts. To appreciate the obvious advantages of using word processors and the PCs they (the CO etc.) need professional training. Of course, many of them may learn about the uses of word processors on the job, but a systematic training at the initial stage will enable them to perform their duties better and learn more about the machine and the system in a professional way. Irrespective of the kind of technology in use, it is important than the staff is efficient in using it.

3.2.2 Understanding the Collective and Complex Nature of Work

Every institution appoints Junior Assistants/Typists, Assistants, Senior Assistants, PAs, Stenos and so on. The work expected of them is usually taken for granted. But a distance teaching institution with its multi-media instructional system will have different kinds of tasks for them, although they may have been recruited under the traditional nomenclatures such as PAs, Stenos, etc. When you give some work to them, they may ask: “Is this the job of a …? You may not be the only one who is trouble by such questions because this confusion about roles and functions would prevail initially at all levels in any new organisation moving on to a new system. Many academics and administrators would have raised questions regarding the ambiguity about their roles and functions. Once the institution chalks out its own rules, job descriptions, and terms and conditions of appointing different categories of personnel the confusion will be cleared. Till then, most of us expect our allied staff to perform different types of tasks related to various aspects of the system. Strict compartmentalisation of work is neither possible nor desirable in an open learning system. In fact, as has been done at many places in the world, we may have to rename/re-designate many categories of personnel to accommodate this need for role-switching.

3.2.3 Keeping Records

In open universities, there is a need to collect and record enormous amounts of data and retrieve them from time to time. Starting from enquiries and admissions to the completion of the course or programme concerned – sometimes even after is completion – the university has to maintain student records, information regarding the courses, dispatch of materials, complaints, requests or enquiries from students, counselling sessions, assignments, examinations, question papers and other learning activities of the students. Information is to be provided from time to time to various personnel at the university and outside it for research, annual reports, budget proposals and so on. Sometimes valuable information gets misplaced or lost because of sheer carelessness or faulty/defective filing systems. The routine information brochures, circulars, newsletters etc. many get discarded as unimportant or simply dumped somewhere without proper arrangements.
for retrieval. Details about expert committees, course writers, the tasks assigned to writers, editors, printers, graphic artists, media persons, requirements sent to the administration, etc. may appear to be very ‘ordinary’ or unimportant, but they are actually very important for the people involved in distance education systems. Clearly, an appropriate, adequate and efficient filing and record-keeping system is essential. And to sustain the efficiency of such a system, each member of the staff needs to be highly sensitive, thoughtful and careful. Training can develop all these among allied staff. Once the right attitude and expertise is achieved, the rest of the operations regarding database of record keeping (manually and using computer both) will become easier.

3.2.4 Getting the Correct Information

All the necessary and correct information about a university as well as the students is essential to enable the planners, policy makers, academics and administrators to get the right kind of information at the right time. If such a database can be built only with the help of computer, it is equally important to feed the computer with correct information and data. Any wrong information feed into the machine will have disastrous consequences. Recording is a skill that could be acquired and perfected only through one’s involvement in the system and by becoming aware of the necessity to have the correct and updated information. While categorising and updating records and files, we should make it clear to the non-teaching staff that they should consult the senior officers so that the information is not simply stored somewhere but also arranged in such a way that it is easily retrieved for use whenever needed. Information that cannot be retrieved without loss of time is information lost. Valuable machines are often underused or unused because of lack of skilled personnel to handle them or because of lack of interest and care among the skilled personnel. Sometimes, because of sheer negligence and indifferences of a few individuals and often because of the lack of knowledge and awareness, we lose large amounts of data and information forever.

3.2.5 Equipment Maintenance

Maintenance of equipment is as important as using it. Take the example of word processors and photocopiers. What will happen if the machines remain out of order most of the time? We can neither build up fresh data nor use the data already stored. Failure of machines is mostly the result of the failure of human beings in maintaining them. In such cases, the more traditional ways of keeping records prove to be more useful and effective. Ironically instead of improving efficiency and saving time, sophisticated machines make people less efficient and cause inordinate delays in situations where the use of technology is not properly understood or socially internalized.

Similarly, we can see typewriters, computers, etc., left uncovered and unprotected against dust and damages. It is also not unusual to leave a machine on and forget about it the whole day long. A fan or a cooler too is a machine – how many of us care to switch them off when we leave our rooms at the close of the day?

3.2.6 Learning from Teaching/Service Units

You must be clear that the work at an open university or a distance education institution is of a complex nature and we will have to work not only individually but also within teams. This requires some conscious
training and patience to orient ourselves to a new situation. We need to impress on the staff that work becomes easy and enjoyable if we start our career or work with a mind and willingness to learn more, give more and take more. There should be an attitude of allowing everyone to grow professionally as well as intellectually. A CO should not think that he/she would always remain a computer operator. An organisation grows when its employees give their best to it and grow themselves. And the employees grow when they work hard and learn from each other.

Of course, not everyone will be doing everything in a School or Division, but the non-teaching staff should know what is necessary for the general functioning of the School or Division in which they work. For example, let us suppose that there are two typists or COs working with four academics and they have two word processors. One typist goes on leave without informing the academics concerned. The academics are in dire need of completing a piece of work which needs another two hours of word processing. But they do not know where the typist/CO has kept the relevant papers, or how to open the file in the computer. The other typist/CO also does not know anything in this regard nor can he/she work on the other word processor. How do we overcome such problems? The answer to the question is that, in an open university, we have to have a collective approach to work and, therefore, we would be more effective in our work, if we get a general understanding about the work done by others as well. Consider another illustration. In preparing the Annual report of a School or Division, someone may be writing the report after collecting the relevant information. But, while collecting the information, the person who is preparing the report will depend on others for correct information. Every bit of information will have to be checked and processed in order that the unit’s achievements and failures are properly reflected in the report. This is possible only when every one realises the significance of the report and contributes individually to compile the collective report. If the work is treated solely as someone’s individual responsibility, then, quite a few important activities of the unit may be lost sight of. This can be avoided if the non-teaching staff and the teaching staff have an overall understanding about the activities of the given unit. Training provides this understanding in good measure.

3.2.7 Sharing the Work

The commonly tendency among all of us is that we should not be burdened with the work of others. Of course, there will not be any such problems if everyone does his/her work according to a proper schedule. But sometimes it so happens that, in spite of our best efforts, we are not able to meet the schedules because of some unforeseen events. Keeping in view the overall interests of the students, we may have to work a little more to complete course preparation, dispatch of the materials etc., and thus meet the overall schedule. In fact, if there is proper work allocation, we can pace our work and complete it without more strain. But one cannot expect to have ideal conditions always. It is true that in any organisation there will be a few elements who would avoid work. We are not concerned with talking about such people here, but with sharing of work at times.

What does sharing mean in our present context? Sharing of work should not mean that some will over-work and some others will shirk work. It simply means that colleagues should help each other from time to time when some of us have to work under pressure of time. Sharing should be reciprocal. We assume that all our staff are working sincerely to meet the schedules and yet we may find some colleagues lagging behind. At such times, do we see any
volunteers to help them in their typing, word processing, etc? Therefore, prior planning and sharing of work at times of need are necessary.

### 3.2.8 Hospitality

The profile of distance students being very different from that of the students of conventional universities and colleges, dealing with them in an appropriate manner is essential. We need to impress upon the non-teaching staff about this fact.

Students and others who come to a distance teaching institution come with a specific purpose to learn and study. Some of them travel long distances, sometimes thousands of kilometers, spending time and money to get their problems solved at the institution. Naturally, they expect us to attend to their problems immediately. What will be their impression about the institution, if they do not get a proper treatment and the right answers? We may not be able to give them right answers sometimes, but we can talk to them politely, share their concern and guide them to meet people who would advise them. After all, the image of an institution depends on the impression the students and the public form about it. Similarly, sometimes one writes a letter or makes a telephone call asking for some special information. We should try to help one to the best of our ability. Rude replies are signs of lack of culture. An empathetic reply and polite words would make the other person feel happy even if he/she does not get the right answer.

In a distance education system, students look for ‘gentle treatment’ precisely because they miss the human factor which is available in face-to-face education. Since distance students do not get immediate feedback, they have lots of questions to ask whenever they write to us or happen to meet us in our offices. If possible that some of the staff may feel bored to answer routine questions especially when they do not have solutions. They may sometimes try to shift the responsibility of answering the questions to some other colleagues. In any case, the students are not going to leave us without getting the answers to their questions. In fact, we should anticipate certain problems which should defy immediate solutions in spite of our best efforts and intentions to solve them, and be ready to look for different solutions without getting panicky. If they are insistent, we may sometimes even ignore their queries or give rude replies to them. Such behavioural traits, if we possess them, will not help the students, nor the institution nor our own growth in our careers. As professionals, we should appreciate their problems and anxieties, and try to help them in every possible way, instead of becoming impolite and rude when faced with genuine questions from them. The role of non-teaching in the context in very important, as they are there to provide a human staff touch to an otherwise mechanical operation.

### 3.2.9 Professionalism

The main difference between a good worker and a bad one is the difference in the quality of work and the manner in which it is done. For example, one is given a 20 page handwritten unit and asked to prepare a typed manuscript for press; if he/she could do it in the shortest possible time with the minimum corrections needed for the second draft, he/she would be considered a ‘professional’- a good worker with the necessary skills and qualities to do the work given. Suppose the same is given to someone else, who types the manuscript three or four times and even then the manuscript is no good he/she is a non-professional. If the person is indifferent to the task assigned, he/she will go on repeating the same mistakes and at times may
make new ones. In the process, the entire operation becomes tedious and there will be inordinate delays in finalising the manuscript and getting the materials printed. If we have good professional typist/CO, all the above mentioned problems would not arise.

Professionalism in typing/word processing is only one example. In fact, we need a professional approach from every one who works in a distance teaching institution. But professionalism can’t be developed automatically (see unit 2, block 4 of this course). We should cultivate it deliberately so as to carry out our tasks effectively. For instance, someone may have been a good assistant in a government office drafting, preparing notes, etc., in an excellent manner suitable to that office, but when he/she is appointed as an assistant in an open university or a distance education institution, there may be variations in the style of drafting and preparing ‘notes’. It is our ability to transfer our previous knowledge and skills to the new situation that makes us professionals. People who lack this ability would usually go on complaining about both real and imaginary difficulties in any situation. Such an attitude would hinder our growth as professionals.

‘Natural’ gifts or talents may be found in some people who are quick to adapt to new situations and jobs and contribute substantially to the growth of the new institution. However, the ‘natural’ talents would disappear gradually if the people concerned do not also make use of their talents in a systematic way. Every activity can be improved to a higher level in operation terms only when we impose strict discipline on ourselves and regulate our activities. Professionalism comes through constant practice and desire to improve our work style and the quality of our output. This is true of typing/word processing, photocopying, filing, arranging meetings, fixing appointments, organising, seminars/workshops, etc.

3.2.10 Sense of Responsibility

Educational programmes of distance teaching institutions can be successful only when they are implemented with a spirit of collective responsibility and commitment. If would be good if each one of us does hi/her our work sincerely and regularly. But if the work is done in isolation or in a mechanical manner, the ultimate goal of making the programmes a success may yet remain unattained. For example, the academics write the course materials, the non-teaching staff completes the word processing etc, printing and publication unit prints the materials and the material distribution unit sends the materials to the students. This is the general pattern of work so far as the process of preparation, production and delivery of course material is concerned. However, there needs to be a proper coordination and joint effort to make the entire series of operations successful. Without realizing the significance of the joint responsibility, we can’t ensure the preparation and production of materials in the desired form, nor can we meet the schedule of deadlines of delivery, course completion and certification.

What is true of materials production is true of all other aspects of distance education, such as audio-video production, providing support, evaluation of assignment-responses, conducting counselling sessions, holding examinations and declaring results. In all these operations, each one working at a distance education system must work with a sense of responsibility so as to achieve client satisfaction.
3.2.11 Self-discipline

In a distance education system, which has been described as a democratised system of education, the responsibilities of staff are more varied, and hence self-discipline is very important. In any organisation rules may be there, but ‘paper-rules’ cannot make one work. (It is common place to say that every rule can be circumvented if the persons concerned do not want to follow it).

Punctuality and promptness are the two basic requirements to discipline oneself so as to become a good worker and a professional. You may have witnessed quite a few things common in the offices which are not conducive to work. For example, some people come to the office late deliberately. Some others would come in time, sign the attendance register, gossip with their colleagues for some time and then go to the canteen, and spend long stretches for time there. There are a few who themselves would not work and would not allow others to work either. It is likely that because of such negative tendencies of a few people, even sincere and good workers gradually acquire a sense of indifference towards their work. Of course, such things could be checked by senior officers, but unless each one realizes his/her own responsibility, it is difficult to maintain discipline by force. The best form of discipline is that which is self-imposed and self-generated.

When we are positive in our attitude, we will enjoy our work, and there will be ample opportunities to interact with our colleagues, discuss the work related issues and think creatively to solve the problems in new ways. Many of our creative suggestions would help others improve their efficiency. Work becomes pleasure when we do it with involvement and gradually work becomes part of our being, which brings about a positive change in our personality. All this is possible if we cultivate self-discipline.

A word of caution

During a training session to cover these aspects of the domain of non-teaching staff; it is necessary to exercise adequate care to see that it does not create the wrong impression that an average employee is seen or thought of as a bad worker necessarily. It needs to be said in no uncertain terms that nobody should think of an average employee as a bad worker. What we have talked about are the common features of a typical work culture which we may experience and face at many work places. The purpose of our talking about them is not to print to an individual or group of individuals, but to bring home the fact that if we want to survive as a learning society, we have to contribute to this survival by bringing about visible, concrete and permanent positive changes in our work culture.

Activity 1

Do you think the areas listed in 3.2.1 are identical to the situation in your institution? Whether your answer to this question is ‘yes’ or ‘no’; please identify crucial areas in which your support staff may need training.

Note: Space is given below for your response. We have not provided any response at the end of the unit.

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### 3.3 JOB DESCRIPTION

A few sample job descriptions are given below for gaining more insights into some of the aspects we have just been looking into.

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<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Registrar’s Office</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Title (Designation)</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
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</table>

**A) Primary function:** To provide secretarial assistance to Superintendents, Assistant Registrars and Senior Officers

**B) Main duties**

1. Examines the matters entrusted to him/her with reference to the University rules/regulations, university calendar, syllabi of various courses, etc.
2. Records office notes on papers under consideration.
3. Initiates and maintains correspondence with other departments/colleges and other external agencies.
4. Initiates follow up action on correspondence and puts up reminders where necessary.
5. Puts up draft communications for setting up examination centres, appointment of examiners, other supporting staff.
6. Prepares draft plans for entrusting work to various examination centers.
7. Prepares statements or other materials from data available in office records received from external agencies.
8. Sorts, compiles and presents data received from other agencies.
9. Puts up print orders.
11. Compares notes with clear, stenciled/typed material/approved drafts.
12. Compares requirements of cyclostyled/photocopied and printed materials and arranges for their reproduction.
13. Submits proposals for modification of planned activities, where necessary, e.g. substitutes for examiners, etc.
15. Summit proposals for authorization of travel by means/class other than that entitled.
16. Maintains files and other records connected with the work allotted to him/her and traces out old references.

**C) Secondary duties**

1. Prepares papers for submission to university bodies, etc.
2. Assists officers attending meetings of university bodies.
3. Maintains Liaison with teachers/heads of departments/colleges on official matters.
4. Attends to public enquiries where specifically authorised to do so.
5) Assists the officers in comparing papers and verification of data/information.

6) Undertakes any other duty as may be assigned to him/her by senior officers.

D) **Tools and equipment used**

   Common office equipment.

E) **Work procedure**

   Follows normal office procedures.

F) **Job Characteristics**

   - **Skill**
     
     a) Education As prescribed by the University/institution Employment (training By promotion from amongst the clerks and experience)

     - **Complexity of duties**
       
       1) Consolidation of statistical data
       2) Proof reading

     - **Contact with others**
       
       Contact with staff of department/colleges for expedition action or delivery of urgent and important papers.

     - **Efforts**
       
       1) Manual dexterity in handling office equipment.

       a) Physical effort
       2) Moving about when personally contacting colleagues in other departments

       b) Mental effort Close attention while performing duties

     - **Responsibility**
       
       a) For operations Accuracy and promptness in disposal of Work
       b) For mental Careful handling of office machines and equipment
       c) For other matters Nil
       d) Confidential data Has access to confidential data, disclosure of which can affect the image and functioning of the unit

   - **Working conditions**

     Normal office conditions

   - **Environmental conditions**

     Normal
Training of Non-Teaching Support Staff

Department : Registrar’s office
Job Title (Designation) : Superintendent/Section Officer

A) Primary function

i) Routine decision-making in respect of the work under his/her charge.

ii) Assistance to the Assistant Registrars/Deputy Registrars in decision-making in the area of work assigned to him/her.

iii) General supervision of the function of the section under his/her charge.

B) Main Duties

1) Attends to day-to-day correspondence relating to his/her tasks.

2) Submits drafts to Assistant Registrars/Deputy Registrars after discussions with them, where necessary.

3) Keeps addresses of officers of other institutions, offices and departments/branches for collection of data, and for communication of decisions, sanctions, etc.

4) Takes routine decisions with respect to cases work under his/her charge.

5) Collects, where necessary, relevant information from appropriate sources, required for decision-making at his/her own or at a senior level.

6) Compiles, where necessary, data of confidential nature for submission to senior levels.

7) Initiates action on important matters of policy procedure and any other complex matter.

8) Communicates decisions taken by him/her in matters falling within his/her area of authority or decisions on matters in cases where the rules are clear or where higher officers or other departments have concurred in the proposed course of action.

9) Makes references to other institutions/departments/branches seeking advice/information.

10) Consults other officers/institutions/departments/branches to facilitate disposal of his/her work.

11) Prepares agenda notes/briefs for the meetings of the university bodies/committees, in respect of important matters within his/her sphere of authority.

12) Attends such meetings (see item 11) and drafts minutes when so required, and takes follow up action on the decisions taken at the meetings.

13) Lays down tasks for the staff working under his/her control.

14) Institutes corrective action where actual performance has been or is likely to be below the planned level of efficiency. Guides the staff under his/her control in discharging their functions.
15) Checks, according to given standards, the work submitted by the subordinate staff.

16) Trains newly inducted members of the staff and the existing staff in new procedures as may be necessary.

17) Exercises day-to-day disciplinary control over the staff under his/her control.

18) Appraises the performance of staff working under his/her control.

19) Examines complaints from public/outside agencies/employees in respect of matters within his/her jurisdiction. Attends to enquiries by the visitors referred to him/her by higher officers.

20) Ensures compliance with security instructions and custody of records and any other equipment or materials.

21) Keeps confidential or secret documents in his personal custody.

22) Ensures timely submission of reports and returns in respect of matters within his/her jurisdiction.

23) Supervises the upkeep of books of relevant rules, regulations, reference folders/guard files, mailing lists, etc.

24) Prepares standing notices on important topics and policy decisions.

25) Directs closing of files on which action has been completed and consigns of closed files for records.

26) Attends to periodical review and weeding of recorded files and destruction of obsolete ones.

27) Visits institutions to make and inspect administrative or other arrangements in connection with various university matters.

C) Secondary duties

1) Maintains liaison with other officers, heads of departments/colleges on official matters.

2) Provides assistance to his/her colleagues where required.

3) Ensures general cleanliness of offices and common utilities and the safety of furniture, fixtures and equipment in his/her custody.

4) Attends to the welfare/problems of his/her subordinates staff.

5) Performs such other duties as may be assigned by higher officers from time to time.

D) Tools and equipment used

Normal office equipment

E) Work Procedure

Follows the work procedure as prescribed in the university manuals, rules and regulations.

F) Sources of supervision

Assistant Registrar/Deputy Registrar.
G) Job Characteristics

- **Skill**
  - a) Education
    - i) Postgraduate or equivalent degree.
    - ii) Assistants and stenographers, who are graduates and have at least 15 years of service/experience.
  - b) Employment, training and experience
    By promotion from amongst the Assistants on the basis of seniority-cum-merit including suitability and proven efficiency.

- **Complexity of duties**
  - i) Has to solve complicated problems requiring an analytical approach.
  - ii) Has to initiate action on complex matters.
  - iii) Has to interpret/apply rules and regulations.
  - iv) Has to participate in higher level meetings
  - v) Has to perform his/her duties in strenuous circumstances.

- **Contact with others**
  - i) Counterparts and higher officers in the university.
  - ii) Other institutions/agencies.
  - iii) Candidates at various examinations.
  - iv) Members of the public
  - v) Staff association and affected employees.

- **Purpose of contacts**
  - i) To obtain information and to clarify decisions.
  - ii) To clarify points of view and resolve differences.
  - iii) To listen to grievances and resolve them.

- **Degree of commitment**
  To the extent authorised by the unit head

- **Effort**
  - a) Mental
    - i) Ability to grasp, analyse and interpret facts/data.
    - ii) Clarity of thought, skills in expression and drafting.
    - iii) Tact in dealing with people.
    - iv) Concentrated thinking.
    - v) Ability to plan or handle multiple tasks simultaneously.
Staff Development Perspectives

b) Physical
   i) Has to be alert, energetic and diligent
   ii) Must possess stamina to bear strain and tension.
   iii) Should be physically fit to move about to make personal efforts and contacts and frequent visits to outstations to inspect administrative and other arrangements regarding various university matters.

- Responsibility
  a) For operations (work)
     i) Ensures speedy disposal of cases falling within his/her powers and timely submission of cases requiring decisions at higher levels.
     ii) Has to ensure completion of tasks under his/her charge according to time-schedule indicated by higher officers or laid.
     iii) Ensures accuracy of work submitted by him/herself.
  b) For materials and equipment
     Has to ensure proper utilisation of material and handling of equipment under his/her charge.
  c) For subordinate staff
     Supervises and guides the subordinate staff.
  d) For confidential data
     Deals with confidential secret data/documents.

- Working conditions
  Usual office conditions. He/She is often required to work beyond normal working hours and sometimes on holidays.

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A) Primary function
   To take dictation and transcribe the same and perform other secretarial functions.

B) Main Duties
   1) Takes dictation in shorthand and transcribes. Also types directly from Dictaphone/tape recorder.
   2) Receives, opens and sorts out mail and submits it to the officers.
   3) Maintains a dairy to note time, data and place of meetings and other engagements and keeps track of all these.
4) Fixes appointments for the officers (and cancels them if necessary). Reminds the officers of engagements and accompanies them, if required.

5) Ensures completion of the papers required by the officers for meetings/conferences to be attended by them. Also ensures booking of staff car.

6) Operates telephones (incoming and outgoing calls) and keeps records for verification of bills.

7) Attends routine enquiries in person, writing or over phone.

8) Types tour programmes, secret/confidential letters, policy matters, research papers, reports, background papers and other materials.

9) Keeps important and confidential records securely.

10) Destroys/weeds out by burning/shredding stenographic record of secret/confidential letters, after they are typed and issued.

11) Carries out corrections in the officers’ reference books/records.

12) Assists officers in arranging seminars/training programmes and providing general assistance to participants/trainees.

13) Attends to other jobs as and when required.

C) Secondary duties

1) Attends routine correspondence on behalf of the officers

2) Maintain diary for recording movement of papers coming to or returned/submitted by the officers.

3) Types from printed books/journals and cuts stencils/makes photocopies.

4) Keeps track of progress of action and attends to such other functions as may be assigned by the officers.

5) Receives visitors/trainees/participants at the airport/railway stations/bus terminus, when required.


E) Sources of supervision: Officer(s) with whom, posted

G) Job characteristics

• Skills

  a) Education 10+2

  b) Experience and training Speed in Shorthand (100 words per minute).

  c) Complexity of duties The job requires fluency in conversation, tact in dealing with visitors/trainees, operation of telephone, consulting various directories, etc.
Staff Development Perspectives

d) Contact with others
- Visitors/trainees/other officers/other offices/airport authorities, etc.

i) Purpose
- For performing in his/her duties generally.

ii) Degree of commitment
- Has to be courteous, tactful and punctual.

- Efforts
  a) Mental
  - Alertness, smartness, concentration
  b) Physical
  - Normal

- Responsibility
  a) For operations
  - Prompt assistance to the officers.
  b) For equipment/material
  - Safety against loss/damage.
  c) Confidential data
  - Safe custody and prevention of leakage.

Instead of outlining the job description of other categories of staff including Assistant Registrars, Deputy Registrars and Joint Registrar who assist the Registrar in his/her functions, suffice it here to outline the job description of the Registrar, so as to complete the picture of one major office of a DE institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Registrar’s Office</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job designation</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
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</table>

A) Primary function
   To exercise all statutory powers related to the property, non teaching staff, conduct of meetings and to represent in law suits and proceedings, etc. of the University.

B) Primary duties (Example from the IGNOU Act, 1985)

1) Acts as the custodian of records, the common seal and such other properties of the university as the Board of Management may commit to his charge;

2) Issues notices and convenes meetings of the Board of Management, the Academic Council, Planning Board and of the committees appointed by these authorities;

3) Keeps the minutes of the meetings of the Board of Management, the Academic Council and the Planning Board and of the Committees appointed by such authorities;

4) Conducts the official proceedings and correspondence of the Board of Management the Academic Council and the Planning Board;

5) Supplies to the Visitor a copy of the agenda of the meetings of the authorities of the university as soon as they are issued and the minutes of such meetings;

6) Represents the university in suits or proceedings, by or against the university, sign powers of attorney, verifies pleadings and deputes his representative for the purpose;
7) Performs such other functions as may be specified in the Statutes, ordinances or Regulations or as may be required from time to time by the Board of Management or the Vice-Chancellor.

C) Secondary duties

1) Takes disciplinary action against such of the employees, excluding teachers and other members as may be specified by the Board of Management by order;

2) Acts as Secretary or Member-Secretary of Board of Management, Academic Council, Planning Board, etc.;

3) Makes a report to the Vice-Chancellor on all the matters in respect of which any enquiry discloses a punishment beyond the powers of the Registrar along with this recommendation for such action as the Vice-Chancellor may deem fit.

D) Work Procedures

Follows the Act, students and regulations and rules of the university.

E) Sources of Supervision

Pro-Vice-Chancellors/Vice-Chancellor.

F) Job characteristics

• Skills
  a) Education As prescribed by the Board of Management from time to time.
  b) Employment Direct recruitment (As stated in the relevant University documents).

• Responsibility
  a) For operations (work) i) Keeps the records, seal and all other properties of the university in safe custody.
    ii) Takes all necessary action to convene meetings of authorities, to conduct official proceedings and to keep their minutes.
    iii) Performs a wide variety of functions for effective administration of the personnel, material and finances.
  b) For materials and Equipment i) Ensures safe custody
  c) Confidential matters i) Exercises utmost care in dealing with them, ensures their safe custody and prevention of leakage.

• Complexity of duties i) Adeptness in organizing high level meetings, in dealing with personnel, material and funds/finances from diverse sources.
ii) Require ability to manage any unforeseen event and to diffuse any crisis situation in the organisation.

• Contact with others
  i) Directors of Schools, Divisions or Centres, Pro-Vice Chancellors and the Vice-Chancellor.
  ii) Members of different authorities of the university.
  iii) Leaders of staff associations.
  iv) Department of Education in the Ministry concerned.
  v) Other institutions/agencies and the public.

• Purpose of Contact
  i) To protect and promote the interests of the university and the staff as well.
  ii) To manage all the affairs of the university.

• Effort
  a) Mental
  i) Ability to manage people, materials and money.
  ii) Clear understanding of the university Act, Statutes, Regulations, Rules, etc.
  iii) Ability to manage the affairs with concentration and skill, despite mental strain and tension at all times.

  b) Physical
  i) Has to be alert energetic and diligent.
  ii) Must possess stamina to bear strain and stress.
  iii) Must be able to move and visit any place and person in and outside the university.

From the above job descriptions of an Assistant, Superintendent, Personal Assistant and the Registrar, you may observe that different categories of non-teaching staff perform different functions, may discharge diverse duties by following specified procedure under given conditions. You will also notice that different categories of job require different skills, capabilities and efforts which together make a person fit for those responsibilities.

The above job descriptions pertain to certain categories of non-teaching staff working in one particular office i.e., the Registrar’s office. Here we must remember two things i) The job descriptions are not universal in character. Depending upon the nature, size and complexity of the office vis-à-vis the organisation the job descriptions would be different for the same categories of staff in another office at the same organisation. ii) The job descriptions are
given keeping in view just one university and hence they cannot even be
treated as comprehensive nor applicable to all organisations. It is all
intended to give you an idea of the job descriptions of non-teaching staff that
work in a particular office. It would help you imagine the job descriptions
for any job in different office in difficult situations. iii) Certain functions,
duties and responsibilities assigned to one category of staff in different
institution in one institution may be assigned to another category of staff in a
different institution. For instance, a task assigned to a Registrar in a
conventional university may be assigned a Deputy or Joint Registrar in an
open university of vice-versa. The point that is being made is that the
variations in job descriptions are possible depending upon, nature, size,
stage, and complexity of the institution and there is nothing wrong in such
variations.

3.4 STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

So far we have discussed the different roles and functions of support/non-
teaching staff, their job descriptions, the need to train them and the need for
changing their attitudes. It is clear, that the training and staff development
activities should be congruent with the functions, duties, responsibilities and
overall job characteristics of different kinds of support staff. Development of
one particular course or training programme for all the staff categories is,
therefore, not advisable. It becomes essential to identify different kinds of
staff development activities that save time, energy and the expenditure
involved. It is essential because, certain staff development activities are
appropriate to only some specific categories to staff. Also, equal suitability of
a particular kind of activity to the staff members with different abilities
within the same category is also doubtful. The point is that the multiplicity
of staff development activities, irrespective of certain training courses being
made available for certain categories of staff, is fundamental to effective
training of staff (see block 5).

3.4.1 Types of Activities

Sibbald (1998) lists out different types of staff development activities, other
than courses, that might assist this process (staff development).

- coaching by a senior colleague;
- secondments;
- temporary membership of a task force or working party;
- custom designed projects;
- job rotation or shadowing;
- standing in;
- in-house informal seminars/workshops/discussion groups;
- tutoring by peers;
- tutoring of peers;
- visits;
- sitting in as observers on committees and ad-hoc meetings;
- committee work inside and outside the university;
- training junior staff;
- self-paced open learning and distance learning;
• representing the department/faculty/university in the wider community;
• giving formal or informal presentations;
• organizing formal events;
• guided reading;
• learning resources (libraries, media services, etc.);
• learning contracts or portfolio approaches.

The above list, however, is suggestive only and not exhaustive.

Activity 2
Write your comments on the type of activities identified by Sibbald for staff development.

As a trainer of trainers the significance lies in grouping the support staff on the basis of the nature, quality and extent of development required by them for making them efficient and proficient in their jobs. Once this is done, the kind of staff development activity/(ies) which is/(are) appropriate to each of the groups is/are to be selected. Some times staff of different categories may fall into a particular group.

For instance, the staff who are all computer illiterate can be put in one group, in case the number of employees in each category is one or two. Obviously, they can be engaged in the common activity of imparting computer literacy to them in a single group. What is important is to identify what the common activity can be? Then the activity can be effected through tutoring by peers through formal training or through any other strategy. This process is equally valid for each of the groups. This is so because no one activity will be equally appropriate/suitable and effective for all the categories of staff or the groups formed on the basis of their training or staff development needs.

Training of higher level/categories of non-teaching staff requires complete, comprehensive and integrated management information system (MIS). Let us discuss below the role of MIS in Training.

3.4.2 Role of Management Information System (MIS) in Training

Information is a critical resource in the process of management. The success of any enterprise largely depends on whether or not its decision-making process is based on a comprehensive and integrated information system. Management information system (MIS) entails collecting, processing, recording and utilising information for organisational needs by means of a network of communication channels which can extend into every corner of an institution and may involve many external relationships as well. It is therefore, necessary for an institution to develop and maintain a well
designed system of information flow which covers all the activities performed at various levels.

The need for designing an integrated and comprehensive system of information flow which encompasses all the activities of an institution is becoming an imperative due to the emergence of a number of factors, such as:

i) the growing size and complexity of the activities normally performed by a modern institution like an open university;

ii) the increasing cost of errors in decision-making.

iii) the development of modern electronic data processing technology, etc.,

The above factors have created conditions in which managements find that there is either insufficiency or abundance of information, which make decision-making process either too dilatory or too cumbersome.

Some of the major deficiencies one can notice in the information systems of large organisations may be as follows:

i) delay and/or irregularity in information input or flow

ii) inadequacy or inaccuracy of information

iii) lack of updated information

iv) disparity and conflict in information obtained from different sources.

v) lack of uniformity in standards or scale of information across units/divisions etc.

vi) excessive details of facts and figures.

One of the major reasons for deficiencies is the ad hoc basis on which we collect and store data. This quick-fix arrangement is to meet a particular situation at a particular time. But an integrated system of information, if developed, can effectively meet the changing needs of an organisation.

An essential prerequisite to the design and effective control of a management information system is a clear appreciation of its value to the planning and control functions of officers at the various levels of an organisation. For this purpose, it may be useful to classify information into the following three broad categories:

a) **Vital:** Information without which the activities of the top management cannot progress.

b) **Essential:** Information which is considered to be necessary and must be regular, systematic and efficient for the performance of the various activities of senior officials.

c) **Desirable:** This includes items of information which supplement the vital and essential items of the information for meeting the demand of ad hoc decisions required to be taken from time to time. In the absence of such information, senior officials cannot continue to discharge their prescribed roles with an acceptable degree of efficiency.

Another way of looking at the value of information is from the view point of its availability, i.e., most easy to obtain, available with some effort, and most difficult to obtain. You should therefore try to make the top level non-teaching staff appreciate the role and value of MIS.
i) Developing an MIS

Before we go for developing an MIS, it is necessary that we obtain a clear understanding of the objectives or our organisation and the plan of action which may have been formulated to achieve those objectives. This will involve a thorough analysis of the various planning and control functions which have to be performed, and their inter-relationships. While doing so, it may be necessary to find answers to the following questions from the various decision-making levels with regard to the inflow of information in consultation with suppliers – internal/external.

i) WHAT information does a worker/official need for performing his/her designated tasks?
ii) WHEN does he/she require and/or get it?
iii) HOW shall he/she get it?
iv) FROM WHERE should he/she get it?
v) WHO should be responsible for furnishing it?

Similarly, a further set of questions would need to be answered with regard to the outflow of information, in consultation with the clients/consumers. Some of these can be:

i) WHAT information should a worker/official give?
ii) TO WHOM should he/she give it?
iii) HOW shall he/she give it?
iv) WHEN should he/she give it?
v) WHERE should he/she do so?

We can record the answers to the above questions in the form of tables depicting the existing and proposed information flows. Of course, we should admit that analysing the inputs and outputs of information is a difficult task. Whatever the case, to develop an effective MIS we need the following components:

Input: This can be in the form of the data generated within an organisation during the course of performing its prescribed functions as well as the data collected from outside sources such as competing organisations or by a study of the general political, social and economic environment. The aim should be to collect the right amount of data from the right source at the right time. Where certain types of data are regularly required for periodic planning and control activities, it may be desirable to prescribe specific reports for the purpose. Again, wherever possible, the data should be quantifiable and capable of being converted into both physical and monetary terms. For quick processing, analysis and utilisation, it may be useful to obtain data in a manner which facilitates preparation of statistical tables, charts, diagrams and graphs and storing with the help of modern mechanical/electronic data processing devices, wherever possible. This would entail considerable effort in the design of forms for the submission of the required reports. So far as the external data are concerned, the organisation may have to supplement its own periodic internal operational reports by research involving study of relevant papers, periodicals, journals, books etc.

Processing of data: This will involve converting the collected data into information with a view to analyse trends and variations and anticipating
results. Some of the major considerations that we should keep in view while processing any data are:

- it should follow an integrated system approach covering as large a part of the institution as it is economically possible;
- it should be related to the information at various levels of the organisation and should be provided both for vertical and horizontal communication;
- it should be predictable and exception-oriented;
- it should provide information within prescribed tolerances of accuracy, timeliness, consistency, adequacy and flexibility.

We can process/analyse data through manual, mechanical or electronic devices. While selecting a particular method, it is important to remember that the chosen method should not only be economical but also speedy and accurate enough to cope with the amount of refined information requirement.

**Storage:** The major consideration, while designing a data storage, should be speed and accuracy with which data can be retrieved. This would involve classification, sorting, summarising, coding and storing large volumes of data either through manually operated filling system (both files and cards) as well as electronically operated devices like tapes, discs, etc. To make the storage system economical and effective, it will be necessary to coordinate the activities of

- the ORIGINATOR of the data;
- the INDEXER who determines the data to be classified, sorted, coded and stored;
- the SEARCHER who would need to locate the data of a particular nature for a specific action/purpose.

This effort at coordination can prove to be highly profitable as it can help in reducing the incidence of omissions or overlapping in data storage and retrieval.

**Output:** Only such information should be reproduced and transmitted which is of direct concern to and the responsibility of the recipient. To illustrate, the operational levels of management will need detailed day-to-day information while the senior levels will require summaries of information relating to key result areas. The form in which the output is to be given will depend on a variety of factors:

- the frequency with which information is required to be submitted;
- the level of understanding of the recipient;
- the nature of equipment available;
- the urgency of the need;
- the ‘value’ of the decision.

**Feedback/Feedforward:** All types of systems control themselves by information feedback which indicates shortfalls in achieving the goals and initiates corrective action. In other words, a system uses some of its energy to feed back information that compares performance with a standard.
One of the difficulties with gathering feedback for purposes of control lies in the fact that it provides historical data which may be more in the form of a post mortem rather than a projection. Intelligent and alert management today is therefore, seeking feedforward control systems instead of depending upon accounting and statistical data regarding post-information. Development of feedforward systems for projections is a difficult task. However, one of the techniques of future driven control is the technique of network planning which can help any management to take anticipatory corrective action in the critical areas of an activity.

**ii) Organisation of MIS**

The responsibility for determining information requirements is primarily of those who are to use it. Management information needs are intimately interwoven with the requirements of the management process. Unless the top management is willing to spend time and effort required in guiding the development of an effective MIS, there will not be any hope for improvement in the management’s decision-making process.

As an institution grows in terms of size and complexity of its activities, it usually requires enhanced services of professional specialists who will not only have a good grasp of the functional information in the organisation but also an understanding of the sophisticated information technologies supported by modern electronic data processing (EDP) devices. Even where an organisation decides against expensive EDP based information systems, it will often find it worthwhile to employ an information specialist to coordinate information systems which are economical, efficient, and effective. The information specialist will be continuously engaged in reviewing the existing information flow to detect symptoms of over-abundance or deficiency and advise suitable corrective action. He/she will have to be on the look out for changes in the internal and external environment in which the organisation operates to adjust the system with a view to providing for new information subsystems – within the overall system to deal with new problems and new sources of information.

It is therefore, necessary to ensure that the workforce has a major say in the development of information systems while the technical interests of the specialist will have a supportive role. In actual practice, it will be necessary to create the right organisational climate in which system specialists and workforce can cooperate fully and freely in developing the information system.

Having talked about the development and organisation of management information system, we need to be aware of some of the reasons for its ‘failure’ as well. They may be due to:

- lack of a sound and comprehensive system of planning and control within the institution.
- lack of top-management’s participation in the development of MIS.
- inappropriate organisational arrangements for the development of MIS leading to open or covert hostility of workforce.
- overemphasis on hardware rather than on a paper design of the information system.
- failure to appreciate the true potential capability of electronic data processing system.
• overemphasis on development of information systems for the control of organizational activities rather than the design of information systems for the purpose of planning.

• lack of selectivity in MIS objectives (often resulting in a frontal attack on all aspects of the work of the organisation rather than concentrating on a few critical areas at a time).

The functionaries who constitute the top management must be appropriately oriented to the development and the use of MIS whenever necessary. Of course, this is the biggest challenge before any trainer.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

The focus of this unit is on training non-teaching staff. Usually, distance education systems give importance to training faculty members, and the role of non-teaching staff in making the systems function efficiently and effectively is taken for granted. This unit points to the significant role played by the support staff and how they can be trained so as to ensure effective system-functioning. By identifying various areas of operation, the unit outlines the role the support staff has to play for the smooth functioning of distance education systems. The unit highlights the importance of MIS, its various components and uses, and the need to orient the top management to it. The obvious implication is that any comprehensive training programme of the non-teaching staff should include appropriate training components which would orient and enable top management as well as the lower cadres to discharge their duties efficiently and intelligently.