

Determinants of Managerial Innovation in University Administration in Sri Lanka

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Reference No : ASP/6/Research /2008/12

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10th August 2010

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ABSTRACT

Universities as higher educational institutions are expected to play a crucial role in shaping and developing human resources required for the development process in a country. Universities are expected to provide employable graduates who must possess the required knowledge and skills with positive attitudes. Thus, providing quality graduates would be one of main purposes of any university. The government of Sri Lanka provides education facilities from grade one to the university level and the total expenditure incurred for the education has been provided from the General Treasury. In this context, the education is imparted free of charge for students. This situation has long been contributed for empowering nation's human resources. The government of Sri Lanka allocates 2.08% of the GDP (Gross National Product)(Central bank of Sri Lanka:2009) to maintain the entire education system (the school and the university education). However, lack of financial resources is one of main constraints being faced by State universities. This situation is severely affecting on the student performance. Even though, there remain financial and other constraints, authorities of the state universities could not reduce or terminate the expected service delivery. Under this situation University authorities face several difficulties in implementing their plans and in achieving their targets. However, this paper argues that despite the financial and other constraints, university administration has to find alternatives to achieve its intended objectives. As an alternative, this study also argues that if the authorities of the university perform in innovative ways in managing their educational programmes, that would lead to improve the quality and the relevance of the output of the universities leading to more effective and efficient administration. Thus, this study examines the utility of innovation theory in university administration in Sri Lanka.

The study attempts to answer several research questions; 1) What would count "innovation" in the university administration? 11), What is the level of innovation in the university administration?, 111). What are the factors affecting innovation in the university administration? and iv). What can be done to improve innovation in university administration in Sri Lanka?.

Both quantitative and qualitative data have been utilized to address the research questions posed in this study.

For the qualitative data, a purposive sample of 20 administrators was selected to explore innovative practices initiated by them. The sample was selected based on mainly a reputed snowballing technique. Descriptive analysis was undertaken to answer the research questions posed in this study.

For the quantitative data, a random sample consisting of 166 (coordinators, heads, and deans) of the public universities in Sri Lanka was selected. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

The findings confirmed that innovation is possible and already functioning within the university administration. Innovation in university administration means introducing and implementing systems of management by using new ideas to improve efficient and effective degree programs, departments or the faculties. The respondents' assessment of behavioral patterns of managerial innovation indicates a higher level. The study presents several innovative practices initiated by the selected university administrators which have potential benefits to the universities in terms of students and the university as a whole. Nearly 60 percent of the sample responses are in the scales of strongly agree to support for innovative behavior. The study identified that the administrators' motivation to achieve is the significant determinant of the managerial innovation in the university administration. This factor alone explains nearly 20 % of the variance of managerial innovations in the university administration. The other determinants are; supportive environment, support of the external environment, skillful human resources, and the administrators' age. These factors altogether explain nearly 37% of variance of the dependent variable. The in-depth interviews also confirm the research findings except the age of administrators. In contrast to the quantitative data analysis, the in-depth analysis reveals that the factor, "administrators' age" does not seem to be a problem. More experienced administrators involve in innovative activities with much confidence. Improving efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of the educational programmes are the direct benefits of the innovation. Based on the findings of the study, policy measures are proposed to improve innovation in the state university administration in Sri Lanka.

Key Words: Managerial Innovation, University Administration, Public Sector

Managerial Innovation : Generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes, and products or services (Thompson, 1965).

University Administration: This means Deans of the Faculties, Heads of Departments and Coordinators of the academic programmes of State universities.