

Coordination

When the organization structure is designed and various organizational units are created, a problem emerges as to how to synchronize the operation of these units and people working therein so that they contribute their maximum to achieve organizational objectives. We have seen in the previous section that, often, conflicts emerge among various organizational functions and individuals. In order to overcome these problems, coordination is needed which is an integration or synchronization of group efforts in the organization.

From this point of view, we can identify the basic features of coordination which are as follows:

1. Coordination is relevant for group efforts and not individual efforts. It involves the orderly pattern of group efforts because an individual who is working in isolation does not affect functioning of others and no need for coordination arises.
2. Coordination is a continuous and dynamic process. It is a continuous phenomenon because it is achieved through the performance of functions. It is dynamic because

functions themselves are dynamic and may change over the period of time. In every organization, some sort of coordination exists; however, management may make special efforts to achieve coordination of higher degree.

3. Coordination emphasizes unity of efforts which is the heart of coordination. This involves the fixation of time and manner of performance of various functions in the organization and makes the individual efforts integrated with the total process.
4. Higher is the degree of integration in the performance of various functions by various persons in the organization, higher is the degree of coordination and higher is the possibility of achievement of organizational objectives.
5. Coordination is the responsibility of every manager in the organization because he tries to synchronize the efforts of his subordinates with others. However, when this does not work, there is need for special coordinators.

Coordination: The Essence of Management

Some authors consider coordination as a separate function of management. However, it is more accurate to say that coordination is an essence of management rather than one of its functions. Essence is defined as the most essential or vital part of any object or idea. In physical terms, essence is the concentrated form of major characteristics of an object, for example, rose essence. In the case of an idea, essence is its central theme. In the case of management, coordination is its essence while its five functions—planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling—are on periphery as shown in Figure 12.1.

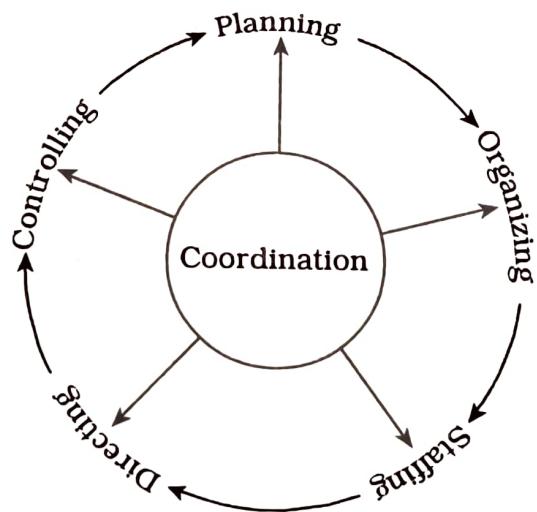


FIGURE 12.1: Coordination: the essence of management

The reasons for treating coordination as the essence of management are follows:

1. The concept of essence relates to intrinsic nature of an object. Coordination, being synchronization of efforts of human beings in an organization, is intrinsic to management as management also tries to synchronize group efforts for achieving organizational goals. For realizing organizational goals, it is necessary that each effort is purposeful, constructive, and contributes to achievement of the predetermined results. Each such effort should tend to help others in the group in achieving the composite effort deemed essential for goal accomplishment. Therefore, managers through their various functions try to achieve this synchronization so that each effort contributes positively to another effort.

2. A management function is different from its essence. A function is a composite of duties closely related in harmonious character and in operational similarity, which for the purpose of execution has to perform some important and some less significant functions. Thus, a function has some objectives and to arrive at that objectives, some more and some less important activities are to be performed. This is true for various management functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling. Each of them has some objectives as well as various subfunctions. In fact, various managerial functions taken individually serve a particular purpose in achieving total managerial goals, that is, getting things done by others. For example, planning element of management decides what is to be done. Similarly, organizing element decides who will do. Coordination, on the other hand, involves the integration of human efforts for achieving the goals which is not a particular function but the basic objective of all managerial functions.
3. When various managerial functions are performed properly and adequate consideration is given to their interdependence, the result is integrated, well-balanced composite effort by the group. The coordination is achieved automatically. When there is poor execution of various functions by various departments or individuals, the problems of coordination arise and special coordination efforts are required. Probably this is the reason that coordination has been recognized as a management function by classical authors and not by authors of modern era. In classical school of management, coordination has been treated as a central problem of management because authors were not sure about the interdependence of various individuals and proper execution of various management functions. In the systems approach of management, execution of management functions proceeds on integrative basis and problem of coordination does not arise but it becomes automatic process. Therefore, all management functions try to achieve integration of efforts and coordination becomes essence of management rather than a function of management.

Coordination and Cooperation

Coordination should not be confused with cooperation, for two terms denote quite different meanings. The term 'coordination' is related with the synchronization of efforts which have amount, time, and direction attributes. For managers, it is a means of viewing in true perspective of work of a particular unit or department of which they may be incharge. Cooperation is basically a motto; a collective action of one person with another or other persons towards a common goal. The basic motto behind cooperation is 'each for all and all for each'. Thus, basic differences between coordination and cooperation can be identified as follows:

1. Coordination is basically achieved through the performance of various activities. In some cases, special efforts may be required for achieving coordination. Cooperation is basically a motto and spirit. The motto of cooperation leads to the development of cooperative system in which physical, biological, personal, and social elements are present. It is based on the assumption that every member of the cooperative system will work in the general interest of the system as a whole and not for his interest.
2. Cooperation leads to building of an institution, for example, cooperative society, etc. In fact, Barnard has visualized every organization as cooperative social system. Coordination being a process is required in all such institutions and organizations.
3. The basic principles of coordination consist of direct contact, continuity of efforts, and reciprocal relations among persons whose efforts are to be coordinated. On the

- other hand, basic principles of cooperation include: (i) voluntary association, (ii) democratic process in performance of activities, (iii) common welfare, and (iv) a spirit of dedication and service with absolute honesty and unquestionable integrity.
4. In a given situation, cooperation may exist without coordination. The case of various cooperative societies and organizations based on the motto of cooperation is in point. In such organizations, there may be lack of coordination of efforts causing inefficiency. For, cooperation emphasizes on the collective actions of members for certain common goals and any organization may be cooperative. However, it is not necessary that coordination exists in all cases.
 5. The basic objective of coordination is the synchronization of efforts of individuals in a work group so that no effort goes in waste. On the other hand, the basic objective of cooperation is to protect the interest of members of a cooperative group specially from the threats presented by conflicting groups.

Need for Coordination

Performance of various managerial functions in an integrated way ensures fair degree of coordination among individuals and departments. However, problems of coordination arise because of the presence of constant change, weak or passive leadership, and complexities inherent in large-scale organizations. In a large organization, there are many types of such complexities which require special efforts for coordination. These are as follows:

- 1. Large Number of Personnel.** The increasing number of persons involved in large organizations complicates the problems of coordination. Each individual is unique and acts differently. Moreover, the individual does not always act rationally. His behaviour is not always well understood nor completely predictable. Therefore, it is not necessary that human beings perform their actions with regard to others and synchronization in efforts may be lacking.
- 2. Specialization.** There is high degree of specialization in modern organizations. Specialization arises out of the complexities of modern technology as well as from the diversity of tasks and persons needed to perform them. Specialization is reflected in the use of specialists of various types. It is the nature of training of specialists that they are made to feel that they are the best judge of the scope, nature, and kind of work they perform. Specialists think that they are qualified to judge each other according to professional criteria, but outsiders cannot have adequate basis for such judgements. If the specialists are allowed to work without coordination, the results can be costly. Therefore, some mechanism is required to coordinate the efforts of various specialists in the organization.
- 3. Functional Differentiation.** Functions of an organization are frequently divided into departments, divisions, sections, and the like. Coordination is, therefore, necessary to link the functions together and assure their contribution to the total result. Coordination problems arise because domains become solidified, with barriers between them becoming rigid. Each unit tries to perform its mission in isolation from the others. Sometimes, this happens because functions are grouped illogical, or managers take the experience rather than the logical route. For example, conflict between sales and production departments arises because of this reason. The sales department has a fundamental interest in selling as much as possible; left to it, it may even sell much more than what production department can produce. On the other hand, it is possible that sales may drop because of market conditions or poor salesmanship or both. In this case, production department may produce far more than can be sold, for it has an economic interest of utilizing the production capacity. In such

a case, it is clear that there are many divergent interests in the activities of these two departments. This problem has to be handled through some means, otherwise organizational resources may go in waste. There may be several such cases in a large organization.

4. Interdependence. The need for coordination arises because of interdependence of organizational units and subunits and people working within these. Because of this interdependence, performance of one unit is affected by others but at the same time affects others. Therefore, in order to optimize effective use of the organizational resources, the efforts of all the units have to be integrated. There can be three types of interdependence: pooled, sequential, and reciprocal. In pooled interdependence, various units of the organization, either located at the same place or at different places, contribute to the organizational objectives though they may not be directly related. This may happen in the case of highly diversified organizations, particularly without product relationship, for example, textile and cement being manufactured by the same organization. In such a case, coordination between two units does not pose big problem. In sequential interdependence, the relationship between units is such that a later unit depends solely on the former unit, for example, in the case of assembling in an automobile company. In such a case, high degree of coordination is required otherwise the output will suffer. In reciprocal interdependence, the input of one unit becomes the output of another unit and vice versa, for example, operation and maintenance of vehicles in a transport company in which operation department may send a vehicle to maintenance department for repair, etc., and the maintenance department may send it back to operation department after repair. In such a case, high degree of coordination is required between two departments.

5. Individual Versus Organizational Interests. There may be a clash between individual and organizational interests. Individuals join the organization to fulfil their desires and expectations. In turn, the organization expects certain things from the individuals. When there is incompatibility between these two expectations, often clash of interests takes place. In such a case, individual efforts may not contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives. Therefore, there is a need for coordination and integration of both interests.

Role of Coordination in Organizational Performance

The above discussion shows that coordination is required among organizational units/subunits and among different individuals. The basic objective of the coordination is to achieve harmonious functioning of the units and individuals so that the organizational objectives are achieved in the best possible way. A proper coordination helps the management for effective performance in the following ways:

1. Proper coordination pulls all the functions and activities together so that each function and activity becomes complementary to each other and contributes positively to the performance of others. In its absence, human and physical resources cannot follow a specified direction and to that extent, organizational efforts would go in waste.
2. Coordination brings satisfaction to the people in the organization. They derive satisfaction out of their performance in a better way because their efforts do not go waste. They try to see their own interests and those of the organization as the same. This on-going process contributes to satisfaction of both individual as well as organizational interests.
3. Since organizations have to work as a system surrounded by the environment, they have to import resources and information from it. Coordination ensures the smooth

flow of information and resources into productive units to bring the required quantity and quality of outputs.

TYPES OF COORDINATION

Because of different types of organizational relationships as evident by various forms of organization structure and authority relationships, various types of coordination are needed within an organization. Besides, the organization interacts with various constituents of its environment and, therefore, it requires coordinative relationship with these constituents. Thus, coordination may be classified in two broad categories: internal and external with different types of coordination in internal category.

Internal Coordination

Generally, when we talk of coordination, we refer to internal organizational coordination. An organization needs following types of coordination: vertical and horizontal, substantive and procedural.

Vertical and Horizontal Coordination. Individuals interact vertically as well as horizontally in the organization during their work performance. Therefore, they need coordination in both such interactions. In the vertical relationship, individuals are put in superior-subordinate positions except those that are at the top level and at the bottom level. Vertical coordination is required to maintain such relationships in orderly manner to get the job performed. Horizontal coordination is required to maintain synchronized operations of various departments, particularly those which have interdependent relationships, for example, production, marketing, personnel, finance, etc.

Substantive and Procedural Coordination. Every work has two dimensions: substantive and procedural. Substantive dimension involves deciding what to do and procedural dimension involves deciding how to do. In every organization, both dimensions of work are required. Therefore, coordination on both dimensions is required. In substantive coordination, emphasis is put on how interrelated activities should be divided so that these are performed in synchronized way. For example, a production manager is responsible for manufacturing products, that is, conversion of raw materials into finished products through some operations. In order to do this work, he requires raw materials of specified quality, in specified volume, and at specified time. However, he may not have control over the procurement of raw materials as this activity may be entrusted to purchase department. Therefore, there is a need for coordinating between production and purchase departments in order to carry on the manufacturing operations. Procedural coordination involves prescribing the procedure for performing those activities which have impact on more than one department. For example, in the above case, procedure for procuring raw materials may be prescribed so that production department gets information about the status of materials procurement and this procedure is adhered to.

External Coordination

External coordination is needed in organization's external relationships with various parties. These parties may be investors and financiers, customers, suppliers, government agencies, and so on. External coordination is required because an organization works as input-output mediator; it takes various inputs—materials, energy, finances, personnel—and supplies various outputs—products and services—to the environment. Success of input-output