

# Chain of Command, Communication Protocols and Its Implications for Employee Bypassing at Universities

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## Abstract

*Universities are operating on the crux of the chain of command and communication channels and these protocols determine the organizational effectiveness and success. Deterring away from the protocols can cause issues of employee bypassing that is a topic of real concern presently. It is therefore, imperative to deliberate on this topic and prudently suggest the way forward for universities.*

**Keywords:** chain of command, communication channels, communication protocol, employee bypassing

## Introduction

Universities as Higher Education learning platforms are commonly seen as the authentic tools for the recognition of teaching and learning, research, community service and outreach, consultation, key strategic priorities, national development and the development of students' as cultural citizens. These are clearly stipulated in their Strategic and/or Corporate Plans. The fundamental goal of every university is to achieve its outcomes/outputs which is measured via its key performance indicators. Operational channels of communication in that regard are imperative in Universities because every managerial/administrative function and activity encompass some form of direct or indirect communication. From the basic principles of management planning, organizing, leading, monitoring and controlling, all University supervisors and administrative workforce communicates with and through other persons. This has implications for organizational success as each person's communication skills impact organizational effectiveness (Luneuburg, 2010a, 2010b). Lack of effective communication channels deleteriously impacts organizational effectiveness (Lutgen, 2010). According to Yate (2009), effective communication channels enhance the success of university administrators. The working relationship is enhanced when each department or unit appreciates its role and relationship to other sections and when communication is regular, open and unmediated. The chain of command is existent in all university structures and reassures effective and precise communication, methodical and systematized university operations, and appropriate resource and time allocation. In the context of Universities as part of the organization culture, given that institutions are built on a hierarchal structure and follow the conventional chain of command, in order to warrant smooth and proficient operations, personnel are generally anticipated to converse work concerns to the supervisor directly above them in the hierarchy for direction and resolution. Typical usurping of the chain of command implies that the adherence to the prescribed chain of command is broken. In such instances when personnel bypass the chain of command and initiate communication with administrators one, two or more rungs above them on the hierarchal ladder, by practice or maleficently, this might result in disclosing information to higher ups without the immediate supervisor's knowledge, seeking counselling without keeping their supervisor in the loop, or seeking help from higher ups just because the personnel feels that their supervisor is inexperienced or incompetent in their job. This is a classic example of bad etiquette. Such behavior inevitably creates issues for the immediate supervisor and obviously, usurping the immediate supervisor creates tension and friction, which can also cause spillover effect on the section. Not only is this seen as disregarding supervisors but also places the personnel's job security in jeopardy. So employee bypassing is a matter of genuine concern to the administration. This research thus deliberates on the significance of maintaining the vigil and communication protocol.

## **Employee Bypassing**

Since employee bypassing is a common occurrence at universities, it is important to curtail it at the emanating stages. Some personnel are habituated to go over their superior's head and report matters higher up the chain of command. It is particularly significant to apprehend the reasons for the bypass to be able to effectively address the issue as leaders. Finding errors/mistakes with supervisors is notably the ultimate motive driving employees to circumvent the chain of command. In addition, some employees break the chain of command to magnify the severity of the matter in order to rationalize usurping the chain of command. The significance of deliberating on the matter punctually with the bypasser is pertinent to be able to diagnose if the incident is a one-off case or endemic. Resolution of the conflict would warrant an overall understanding of the background of the conflict with all parties. It is also imperative that the bypasser dwells on their behaviour and probes on their motives for bypassing and how it could have been prevented.

## **Discussion**

Breaking the chain of command shows a lack of respect for authority. At any university nationally, regionally or internationally, the chain of command and communication protocols always remain intact. Chain of command and information flows can be easily understood through the organizational chart of any Higher education institution. Deliberately or out of ignorance skipping the chain of command is unacceptable behaviour. When staffs respect this protocol, issues can be handled effortlessly and efficiently. Communication exchanges can be disbursed in a timely manner, augmenting the management strategy and overall business decorum. Indeed, this approach may seem inflexible and demanding to those who are constantly 'leapfrogging', however, it does support order and this is an advantage worth defending. Jumping the chain implies a lack of trust amid the employee/subordinate or their superior personnel that they are jumping over. There are a number of key strategies that could be deployed to curtail employee bypassing: First of all, providing the immediate supervisor and the superiors the opportunity to address workplace concerns prior to throwing the matter up the rungs of the ladder. Openness in communication, proper disclosure, transparent approaches, and professional courtesy are the cornerstone of building trust and an effective team. It is important for the employees to comprehend that matters pertaining to their job should not be disclosed to other professional colleagues and the temptation to discuss with administrators higher up the hierarchy should be avoided. This is to stick to the chain of command except in extreme cases. Secondly, administrators who manage their employees, must be appealing, culturally sensitive, precise in communication, and should always present facts and evidences when discussing matters of concern. The discussions emanating should also shed light that bypassing is having a negative effect on operations. It is pertinent to enquire why an employee bypassed, and as leaders propose resolutions on how all parties to the matter can meet their goals by ensuing the chain of command. Apprising the bypasser of the correct/appropriate communication protocols enhances their understanding. Thirdly, it is quite significant that in University settings, higher-level managers and leaders ought to circumvent collaborative discussions with employees regarding workplace issues if the employee has not discussed it with their immediate supervisor. Reasonably, the employees should be steered back to the immediate supervisor, and counselled on the apposite communication protocols. Finally, another important and valid point concerns the fact that employees should repel the impulse to jump in and bypass when they have an idea, proposal, distress, or frustration. It is critical to present the information appositely. Deliberating on the matter and working collaboratively in exploring resolutions allows respect and honor for the team. Consequently, endorsing internal communication is an utmost core to ensuring smooth operations. An organizational climate built on the thrusts of openness, transparency and free flow of communication and information permits a conducive climate at the workplace.

## **Conclusion**

In order to improve university administration, channels of communication or communication protocols needs to be established and enhanced. This can be addressed through leaders having open-door policy which can promote open discussions and deliberations. An important element of the leader's job entails periodically administering employee attitudes and behavior and providing counselling where needed. Training can also be provided and employees need to be informed that violating the chain of command will be immediately referred to the correct level of supervision. It should also be mandatory to notify supervisors of what was communicated when skip level dialogues occur.

## **References**

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