
Autonomy in Higher Education - Towards an Accountability Management Model

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education Institutions cherish the desire to obtain the status of 'Autonomy'. This gives substantial freedom and maneuverability to improve the quality of education and global brand building exercise which is crucial for their survival and growth in the face of challenges and competitions. Autonomy implies the freedom to have self-sustainable practices in the overall management of academic and administrative matters. Developing new courses, designing curriculum, determining fee structure, admission of students, engaging teachers, remuneration and retention, teaching-learning, examination and evaluation, and grading, all come under the purview of autonomy. Eventually, autonomy is paving way for increased responsibility and accountability. This paper aims to discuss the institutional responsibility-autonomy linkages in the main operational areas of autonomy and illustrates the accountability outcomes of autonomy. An attempt is also made to arrive at an Accountability Management model that compares conventional management practice styles and Accountability Management practice styles and discusses the processes which come into play therein. Besides, key principles of Accountability management are elaborated.

Keywords: Autonomy, Accountability Management, Higher Education Institutions

1. INTRODUCTION:

It has become common in developed countries to give autonomy to educational institutions. Devoid of political and bureaucratic control, autonomy helps institutions to improve their systems and practices to enhance quality standards, thereby contributing to society. Autonomy helps institutions to think independently with responsibility and generate accountability. Such thinking is considered as 'thinking from the top'. On the other hand, in many countries, higher education is controlled by corrupt politics and bureaucracy and

hence they cannot think independently. Institutions that cannot think with responsibility and accountability to further their growth are considered as ‘thinking from the bottom’. Such institutions remain stunted chained by regulations of accreditation organizations. Autonomy implies the freedom to have self-sustainable practices in the overall management of academic and administrative matters. Developing new courses, designing curriculum, determining fee structure, admitting students, engaging teachers, remuneration and retention, teaching-learning, examination and evaluation, and grading, all come under the purview of autonomy. Eventually, autonomy is paving way for increased responsibility and accountability.

2.RELATED WORKS :

There are many scholarly research publications on issues related to autonomy, innovation, best practices, pedagogy, quality, accountability, etc some of which focus on teacher accountability and institutional autonomy. A gist of selected works is provided in table 1.

Table 1: Related Scholarly Work

S. No.	Area of Work in HEIs	Focus / Issues	Reference
1	Teacher accountability	Performance indicators for accountability and improvement	Banta, T. W. et al. (1994). [1]
2	Teacher accountability	Change in accountability system in HE system	Wellman, J. V. (2001). [2]
3	Teacher accountability	Funding and autonomy for reform and accountability	Kallison, J. M. et al. (2010). [3]
4	Teacher accountability	Societal Expectation And Institutional Accountability	Aithal, P. S. et al. (2015). [4]
5	Teacher accountability	'Theory A' for managing people for performance	Aithal, P. S. et al. (2016). [5]
6	Teacher accountability	Application of Theory of Accountability on faculty performance	Aithal, P. S. et al. (2016). [6]
7	Teacher accountability	Accountability pressure, academic standards, and educational triage	Lauen, D. L. et al. (2016). [7]
8	Teacher accountability	Need for accountability in education in developing countries	Mbiti, I. M. (2016). [8]
9	Teacher accountability	Dynamic effects of educational accountability	Macartney, H. (2016). [9]
10	Teacher accountability	Seven Silos of Accountability in Higher Education	Brown, J. T. (2017). [10]
11	Teacher accountability	How to Boost Faculty Research Performance using Theory of Accountability	Aithal, P. S. (2018). [11]
12	Institutional autonomy	The concept of autonomy in Higher education	Warnock, M. (1992). [12]
13	Institutional autonomy	The decline of academic autonomy in higher education	Benjamin, E. (1994). [13]

14	Institutional autonomy	Academic identity and autonomy in a changing policy environment	Henkel, M. (2005). [14]
15	Institutional autonomy	Regulatory autonomy and performance	Enders, J. et al. (2013). [15]
16	Institutional autonomy	Academic freedom and university autonomy	Ren, K. et al. (2013). [16]
17	Institutional autonomy	Strategic Planning in Higher Education Institutions	Srinivasa Rao, A. et al. (2015). [17]
18	Institutional autonomy	Autonomy and Accountability in Higher Education	Tripathi, K. et al. (2016). [18]
19	Institutional autonomy	Opportunities and Challenges for Private Universities in India	Aithal, P. S. et al. (2016). [19]
20	Institutional autonomy	Autonomy for excellence in higher education in India	Sankaran, K. et al. (2016). [20]
21	Institutional autonomy	Innovations in private universities	Aithal, P. S. et al. (2016). [21]
22	Institutional autonomy	Autonomy and accountability in institutions of higher education	Zare, R. N. (2018). [22]
23	Institutional autonomy	Autonomy in Higher Education	Waghodekar, P. H. (2018). [23]
24	Institutional autonomy	Analysis of Higher Education in Indian National Education Policy Proposal 2019	Aithal, P. S. et al. (2019). [24]

3. OBJECTIVES AND AGENDA :

The paper is conceptual in nature and the following objectives are set:

- (1) To know the implications of autonomy for higher education institutions
- (2) To relate autonomy with institutional accountability
- (3) To identify responsibility – accountability linkages
- (4) To determine the accountability outcomes of autonomy in HEIs
- (5) To distinguish conventional management and accountability management
- (6) To attempt an Accountability Management model that applies to organizations/institutions

4. RESPONSIBILITY-ACCOUNTABILITY LINKAGES:

Starting from designing curriculum to admitting students, teaching-learning, examination, evaluation, and grading, covers the broad spectrum of institutional activities that benefit from autonomy and translates its responsible actions to ensure accountability. Eight major areas of autonomy identified and discussed here reveal the responsibility-accountability relationship on the institutional side. For instance, it is well within the responsibility invested in the institutions having the autonomy to choose courses which they should offer. Conventional multipurpose courses now serve no use such that institutions should respond to changing times and evolving context of job markets. Business Analytics, E-Commerce, Supply Chain Management, etc. are some such examples of evolving

interdisciplinary areas. While at the same time, it shall be binding to ensure that the students who take up such courses are employable and secure employment. Another aspect is designing a curriculum where it is well within the maneuverability of institutions to make it student-centric. This would ensure adequate development of the knowledge and skills of the students. Coming to admissions to various programs, the institution should ensure merit as decisive to preserve the equal opportunity to all prospective students. The fee is a sensitive issue because it is the financial backbone of the institution. The very high fee structure can prevent genuine students from losing the opportunity, while very low will render unviable to operate or maintain quality. The responsibility in this regard would be deciding on a reasonable fee structure and obviously, it demonstrates accountability very well [25-26].

Teachers are the instruments of the institution which would serve to display its accountability through the fulfillment of the goals of the institution. The goals would invariably include quality teaching to quality produces. The responsibility of hiring competent teachers thus becomes important. Remunerating and retaining such teachers call for equitable rewards that reflect the institution’s accountability to maintain a contented and productive workforce. In modern times partnership-based learning has received great attention in higher education, where teaching and learning are mutually complementary. Students and teachers narrow their distance (physical and intellectual) and students actually become empowered to discover knowledge. Learning what they don’t know is also discovering knowledge because the teacher then assumes the role of a facilitator. This cannot be attained in the conventional frame and needs to evolve innovations and best practices. Examination and evaluation put together is the true measure of student competence acquired through doing the course and it is the responsibility vested in the institutions to make it so. Foolproof examination and evaluation spell out the accountability of the institution for results that are a true measure of competency acquired. In the end, grading serves to indicate the accomplishment of students, and reflect the quality of the institution [27-28]. The institutional responsibility-accountability linkages are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Institutional Responsibility and Accountability Linkages

Sl.No.	Area of Autonomy	Explicit Responsibility	Implicit Accountability
1.	Choice of Courses	Customized to industry relevance	Employability generation
2.	Designing Curriculum	Student-centric in focus	Development of knowledge and skills
3.	Admission of Students	Merit as decisive	Ensure equality of opportunity
4.	Determining fee structure	Reasonable viable	Not deterrent to deserving

5.	Engaging Teachers	Depends on competence	Fulfillment of goals of the institution
6	Remuneration and Retention	Equitable rewards	Contentment for sustaining efficiency.
7.	Teaching and Learning	Innovations and Best practices	Partnership based learning
8.	Examination and Evaluation	True measure of competence	Commitment to results
9.	Grading	Projects accomplishments of students	Reflection of quality

5. ACCOUNTABILITY OUTCOMES OF AUTONOMY :

It is interesting to see the accountability dimensions in terms of institutional, teacher, and students against some of the prominent actions and its outcomes, in the major areas of autonomy. Taking, for instance, autonomy to offer new courses will result in exploring new opportunities which suits the needs and interests of the prospective students as well as the demand factor in the job market, existing body of knowledge already accumulated in the subject, influence of other institutions and even those of competitors. Similarly, the autonomy for curriculum design and development affords plenty of freedom to customise as per need and relevance. Taking the two together it will create institutional accountability of filling knowledge gaps, a lasting pursuit for higher education institutions, as well as converting it student-centric. Teachers are accountable through building the desired competency among the learners as well as enhancing student learning. Students also display accountability by offering themselves willingly to take challenges opened up through the new courses and demonstrate increased involvement in learning. Accountability dimensions of nine major areas that can translate autonomy in action are listed in table 3.

Table 3: Accountability Outcomes of Autonomy

Sl.No.	Autonomy in Action	Outcome	Institutional Accountability	Teacher Accountability	Student Accountability
1.	New Courses	Exploring opportunities	Filling knowledge gaps	Building desired competency	Willingness to undertake challenges
2.	Curriculum Development	Customization	Student-centric focus	Enhance student learning	Increased involvement in learning
3.	Teaching-Learning Methodologies	Variety and diversity	Promoting innovation	Adopting Best practices	Developing Partnership
4.	Determining Fee Structure	Generating Revenue	Maintaining quality service	The best return for the students	Value for money

5.	Remuneration and Rewards	Fair Rewards	Rewards suited to serve as motivators	Expressing commitment	Respect for the profession
6.	Examination and Evaluation Reforms	True and Objective assessment	Ensure transparency	Best suited to student needs	Reverence and acknowledgment
7.	Faculty Performance Assessment	Merit as a measure of performance	Nurture standards	Maintain consistency	Honest and objective
8.	Student Associations	Cultivate leadership	Practice democracy	Empowered students	Avoid misuse
9.	Grading	Translating assessment into the score	A true reflection of judged ability	Symbol of effort	Mark of success

6. CONVENTIONAL VS. ACCOUNTABILITY MANAGEMENT :

Conventional management and Accountability management is distinguished in Table 4. Seven major styles of practices in conventional management are listed and the corresponding styles in accountability management are presented. The start of an activity is assigning responsibility. In contrast, accountability management is more proactive, the individual owns to assume responsibility. If this condition is to be created a process has to be set in motion which gives greater and sufficient role clarity for the individual. Role clarity here is not about structured rules, structured relationships, and structured rules but of understanding and identifying himself as the performer. This evolves out of conceptualization of self where the individual looks inward rather than look outward to discover his role. Targets are set and given, rather imposed on the person usually in conventional management practice whereas in accountability management the person arrives at the target, a process involving role perception –how he looks at it – as friend or enemy. This boils down to looking at work (and target) as a friend or enemy, definitely a question of attitude. The consciousness of the task enables one to befriend the target. Individuals work as a team in executing a task and usually, teams are engaged. Accountability management believes that teamwork is inherent quality, but there needs to further teamwork through a process of role enrichment where the employee identifies his role as being shared by others and integrate himself into a team. This builds a bond that releases considerable synergy through collaborative action. Extracting work is most often what conventional management is all about. Every other activity is built around making it softer in appeal to the individual. Accountability management believes in creating (generating) work, something that is a conscious and willful action of the individual. This is set in place through a process of role actualization, a condition that is manifested by a philosophy of creative manifestation. In order to sustain and maintain momentum, incentives are used as inducements. It could be material or non-material inducements.

Table 4 :Horizontal Vertical Matrix of Accountability Management

Conventional Management Practice styles	Accountability Management Practice styles	Processes	Principles
Assigning responsibility	Assuming responsibility	Role Clarity	Conceptualization of self
Fixing Target	Arriving at Target	Role Perception	Consciousness of Task
Engaging Teams	Promoting Teamwork	Role Enrichment	Synergise through collaboration
Extracting work	Generating performance	Role actualization	Creativity manifestation
Inducing incentives	Projecting models	Role modeling	Positive message
Subjecting to assessment	Jointly reviewing	Role matching	Collective reflection
Monitoring	Recycling	Role reactivation	Goal attainment

In accountability management projecting role models is initiated as a process throughout. These role models are the best performers. The idea is to lay a positive image to copy so that inhibitions or negative feelings are reduced. Performance is periodically assessed, a painful feeling for the individual is replaced by a joint review that leads to a process of role matching which is real learning. Such learning paves way for improvement. Here the philosophy adopted is a collective reflection, where no accusing finger is pointed. Lastly, there is monitoring which means keeping track of individual and his work. This is replaced with recycling where drawbacks are washed out through a process of reactivation. This is the point of attainment of the goal [29-31].

The sequencing in conventional management is vertically matched with sequencing in accountability management. The accountability management may be visualized both horizontally or vertically as depicted in the table. The individual is replaceable in an accountability management model with an institution. Here, for instance, autonomy refers to a new environment (conditions) to function for the organization and is synonymous with a new individual in a job situation. Autonomy release a host of issues that alter the work environment for an institution where it has enough choices to make by virtue of the extent of freedom vested in it. Hence involves the adoption of management practices, of how an institution should be managed, just as how an individual should be managed.

7. CONCLUSION :

The present era of evolving organizational-institutional behavioural theories has thrown up new systems of management, the one that is suggested here namely Accountability Management. Accountability management is distinguishable from Conventional man

management or Human Resources Development Management. It presupposes that an urge for creativity exists in every individual and work is an expression of creativity. Individual loves work and likes works, where he is provided the opportunities to own a sense of belongingness with his work, assume responsibility instead of assign responsibility, arrive at target instead fixing targets, promoting teams instead of engaging teams, generating performances instead of extracting performances, projecting models instead of inducing incentives, jointly reviewing instead of subjecting to assessments, and role reactivation and recycling instead of monitoring. Overall the Accountability Management model is meant to build and manage accountability, not individual or his work. The model suggested here has great relevance because it is not limited to individuals in work situations, but also to organizations and institutions that function in a broader social environment where particularly there is scope for autonomy in operation.

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