

Is the present system of selection and appointment of Vice Chancellors in India throwing up incompetency?

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Prelude

With due respect to the existing Vice Chancellors assigned at various universities in India, efforts have been made to share some worrying thoughts on the subject. We are deliberating on the “system disorder” and not against any individual. The mentions of few examples in general is to depict the existence of incompetence in the system of higher education.

Let me begin with a quote by Richard Burke on the importance of an effective System for selection and appointment as VC, “Aspiring and applying Professionals (academicians as well as from industry) must have confidence in the system existing for identification, selection and appointment as VC or otherwise the spirit of appointment will be jeopardized.

Unless the best and competent professionals are identified, selected and appointed, faith of all the other stake holders including the most important one i.e. students will be shaken. It is essential that professionals be selected and appointed who will be best qualified to lead the system to its logical purpose and most desirable results.

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They preferably must have desired qualifications, such as good administrative and academic ability and a wide array of knowledge, but most of the other stake holders must also have absolute confidence in the competence of those selected and appointed.

Should the less “competent” personnel be selected, there will come a time during the subsequent part of tenure when the system of higher education will fail because of its leadership. The degeneration in the system during the tenure will be of irreparable nature.

Like begets like (e.g., ducks pick ducks), and inadequate personnel, once they have moved up sufficiently to be on a selection board, will themselves be apt to select other inadequate personnel.

It is observed that now-a-days lot is discussed against the effective functioning of Vice Chancellors of Universities located at places across India. This invariably happens in various congregations and gatherings and during formal and informal discussions with stake holders of various levels from the system of higher education, say faculty, students, non-teaching staff, parents, educationists, academic research scholars and other active or passive stake holders and also the Vice Chancellors themselves.

During such meetings and discussions, one gets a feeling that many problems and issues being faced by active stake holders of system of higher education is due to incompetency and total submissive academic leadership, which in turn is the result of presently

followed “full of defects” selection system. This may be because of lack of updatation, innovative thinking or initiatives on behalf of policy makers and also decision makers for selection and appointment of Vice Chancellors for various universities.

This system may be the result of blind following of legacy of British Raj / old and routinely followed systems. The present policy may have worked satisfactorily in the past. But direct interference from political system (or even the money lobby) now, has proved to be an “influencing factor”. Frequent media reports of increasing number of cases of “indiscipline” / “impropriety” / “moral turpitude” by the “properly selected and appointed incumbents” on the posts of Vice Chancellors, across India is really alarming to the sanctity of system of higher education. Such cases cannot be and should not be counted in terms of percentage. Such cases are to be treated as the essential and important “quality Indicators” during the audit of system of higher education.

Background

Let us assess as what is really needed or mandatory for a professional to lead the University as Chief Executive (Academics and Administrative). It will be worth to deliberate / discuss various relevant issues from their relevancy and adequacy perspective.

A. Academics

- a. Administration
- b. Qualifications

B. Administration

- a. Academics
- b. General

C. Self-Management

D. Professional Management

A. Academics

Chief Executive (Academics)

The Vice Chancellor of any university should be adequately qualified, academically. The adequacy in India is understood as Doctorate as minimum i.e. Ph D.

Academics (Qualifications)

Surprisingly there is no clarity about the:-

- (a) Why; Ph D is minimum. There are known cases of “doubtful means” being used to manipulate and receive this “honourable” qualifications. There were agitations by the employee association of one of the university in South India about the way Ph D was received by the VC of that University, who was duly appointed by following “statutory” procedure.
- (b) Which subject: relevant / recognised for the needs of the region and consideration for the post of VC?
- (c) When completed?
- (d) Utility of the research work for any social / professional needs
- (e) Why adequate industrial experience could not be considered “the” sufficiency criteria,
- (f) How / why then IAS / Defence officers without Ph D are selected and appointed as Vice Chancellors etc

Administration

- (a) Academics
- (b) General

Academics (Academic Administration)

As known and also accepted by all of us, the syllabi of most of the academic courses those conducted in India to have become “outdated” or “not in sync” in its utility / spirit. Assurance of employability of the graduating students by the system of higher education is at the lowest ebb. The credibility of the functioning of “Board of Studies” is doubtful. Here we are talking about the “generalised cases” (which are about 90 % in India) and not about the “Centres of Excellences”, which are countable on fingers and are few in numbers. Active involvement from the industries and other employers in framing the “functional” syllabus is still in “wanting” stage”. Many actions on this front are like “we also ran” type, without having any tangible and seen effects.

The VC, as the head of Academic administration will have to manage this important issue of “value additions” or “updatation” of various “other” (other than his / her own) subjects which will be absolutely new to him / her once after taking over as VC. There

will be a great resistance from the peers to allow the VC to get involved in “their affairs”. But if it is not handled effectively by VC, the issue of “credibility / social utility of the syllabi” will remain in limbo, for ever.

Thus “Academic Administration” of the University becomes a great challenge during his / her tenure as VC.

Does today's procedure of selection of VC caters for this aspect? The clear answer would be “NO”. The standard application form needed to be submitted by the VC aspirants does not cater specifically for assessment of this aspect at all.

The issue of “Academic Administration” thus becomes the soul of the functioning of Vice Chancellors of any University.

Chief Executive (Administration)

This issue is of more importance and relevance for the functioning as Vice Chancellor. As a professor (one of the basic criteria to be a Vice Chancellor) s/he must have been confined to only for the administration of her / his department, which was miniscule as compared to the vastness of system of University. The sheer magnitude of administration of the university may thus become “an unmanageable” issue. As on date there is no system in vogue / existence to train such aspirants on “administrations” aspects.

Administration, in its larger context, could be broadly categorised as:-

- (a) Academic Administration
- (b) General Administration
- (c) Financial Administration
- (d) Campus Administration
- (e) Resources Administration
- (f) Human Resources Development and Administration
- (g) Brand Administration etc

Academic Administration

As a Chief Executive of University System, s/he must be conversant with this domain. Every subject is different from its contents and social utility. It is also

known to and accepted by all of us that the “syllabi of most of the subjects (even professional courses like engineering and management education) are outdated; having lost its relevance and utility value for the associated profession as well as society. Also no priority could be accorded to the subject of her / his specialisation or liking. Vice Chancellor from Geology should not make “additional” efforts to start the courses in Geology in a university which is geographically located in the area known as “Non-seismic zone” but better known as “agrarian”; thus having no social relevance. The students admitted in such courses may not be “sensitive” to the subjects. The subjects available for the study generally should have a universal applications besides serving the immediate social needs.

S/he must do justice to the following in the field of academic administration:-

- (i) Relevancy / utility of the contents of the syllabus with the help of confederations / federations / associations of industry
- (ii) Continuous Enrichment of the syllabi
- (iii) Continuous Value additions to the contents
- (iv) Continuous Updating of the syllabi
- (v) Assurance of imparting applied Skills, relevant to the subject.

General Administration

This domain is of utmost importance, because there is no provision to formally teach / learn this subject to / by anyone at any level of academics as on date in India. General Administration is very difficult to define it precisely. Any non-academic / non-technical / non-professional issue not covered anywhere is very conveniently included under the head of “general administration”. The “hands on experience” and “do it yourself” methodology is only the way to master the art of “effective administration.

Hard core academicians with no prior experience will find it difficult when exposed to university administration system having multi department system under its control. It was experienced that many incumbents were total failures on this count when functioning as Vice Chancellors due to their inadequate capacity / capability to effectively exercise the control over this particular aspect. Non-teaching staff will be the first to notice this shortcoming and will be the first exploiters and also worst sufferers.

Financial Administration

It is expected that Vice Chancellor of any university must have in-depth knowledge of “University finance systems”. Resources mobilisation and justifiable / equitable utilisation for various purposes (academic as well as non-academic) will be the acid test for the incumbent.

An academician; say at the level of even “professor” meeting all other statutory eligibility criteria for the assignment of VC; might not have dealt with “finance” on large scale except on “recommendation” / “for your perusal please” limits. Resources mobilisation was never his / her cup of tea or was beyond their jurisdiction / imagination due to service and functional limitations. It then becomes a herculean task when getting exposed while taking the decisions related to financial allocations and sanctions for their expenditure and also the audit for the same.

The history of Indian Higher education has many glaring instances to show of financial irregularity in university finances or giving up to the demands from the “sharks” who might have helped her / him to become Vice Chancellor in spite of having the “well defined” process in place to select and become a Vice Chancellor.

It is ethical on part of VC to be absolutely transparent on all the dealings related to financial matters as he is being seen “through” as if “made of glass” by everyone around him / her.

A case of Vice Chancellor of University getting arrested just few days before he was to relinquish the office of VC is still fresh in the minds of academicians. The worst was, no one from his “supporter / well-wisher / promoter” was there even to stand for his bail.

This domain becomes very tricky if s/he has buckled down to the political pressure to have managed to become VC after paying some kick-backs. This fact is like an open secret today. Also it is very “well known secret” that this aspect is very difficult to be justified / defended in the court of law.

Campus Administration

This is the trickiest issue a Vice Chancellor has to handle during his / her tenure. It is obligatory on the part of VC to look beyond his / her office or university building. Generally the traditional / conventional VC

aspirants are not used to this aspect because it is beyond their jurisdiction. They have not been “concerned” about this aspect. It has been experienced that number of campuses, though large in areas do not have “Synergy” in the campus. The humans in the campus are found working as machines without any empathy towards the most important stake holder called “visitors” and “students”. Teamwork and humane approach is found to be lacking. Rules are generally quoted for “how the demanded work cannot be done” rather than finding the solutions to the problems. The existence or otherwise of Synergy on the campus could be felt by all including the short time visitors. Synergy could be the resultant of combined energy of the stake holders, clarity of purpose of working, pursuance of excellence, helping attitude by one and all, pride in the purpose of working, welfare as motivation etc.

VC cannot be an “office loving / confined” professional not knowing the realities on ground. Formal visits (say only on invitation???) to various constituent departments may not help him / her to achieve this aspect of synergy.

Knowing “on ground” and “real time” realities in the campus will help the VC in chair to achieve this aspect.

Resources Management / Administration

This is one of the challenging aspect for any Vice Chancellor. Resources of any kind have a cost. There are financial aspects attached to this aspect. Resources of all kinds and in desired proportions at desired time will never be available for VC of any type of university viz government / Deemed or Private etc. Management with and of available resources is generally an acid test for the VC. S/He has to master the art of “managing with available resources”. Resources mobilisation of various types and in varying quantity for self and other stake holders is the continuous challenge to the VC in chair.

Human Resources Development and Administration

This is one more acid test for the VC in chair, as s/he has to deal with professionals / not-so-professionals, employees of the university, promoters (of HEIs) and faculty from various constituent and affiliated departments / institutions, stake holders of various types etc. They may be with / from various educational qualifications, mindset, interest, IQ, EQ,

aspirations etc. The time gap to interact with variety of people may be just fraction of second. The reaction time may be of equal magnitude. Expectations of such interactions may be different. It is very difficult to predict the human reactions and emotions, especially when the decisions taken are not in their favour or not in line with their expectations. And one dissatisfaction may result in chain reaction which may prove to be harmful if not contained in time.

Human resource development / management / administration is not the subject dealt with by professionals / academicians from domains / specialisations other than “Management Education”. It is not like “general practitioners” when dealing with human aspirations. It needs special attention and focus.

People management is the “art” and not a “science”. It has to be effective.

Brand Administration and Enhancement

This domain will definitely be unknown to the (first time) VCs in normal practices. “Brand of the university” is developed over the years by following quality practices, good practices, ethical practices etc. As on date every “identity” strives hard to upgrade their “brand value”. Every university / HEI is not far behind to get involved in the process of “Brand enhancement”, as their “brand value” helps them for the following:-

- (i) Respect from various sections of the society
- (ii) Recruitment of competent faculty
- (iii) Recruitment of support staff
- (iv) Admission of the students to fill all the available vacancies
- (v) To receive grants from various statutory and non-statutory agencies and organisations for various purposes.
- (vi) To be always in lime light
- (vii) To be seen as functioning for the desired social cause.
- (viii) To have its distinct identity in the society, etc

“Brand” and its “value” is never an overnight creation. The stake holders have to work hard for a long period, may be decades to come to some respectful level.

The “brand” of every university has its own “value”. Every VC is expected to strive hard to maintain and then upgrade the “brand value” of that university. It is a general misconception that the “age” or “Grand Infrastructure” of the university creates the “Brand”. It is the

“mechanism and untiring practicing for continuous value additions” that needs VC's immediate and continuous attention.

In many cases having a “peaceful tenure” without any major setback (read scandal) is the intention (say hidden agenda) of the Vice Chancellors. Their contribution at the end of their tenure is just NIL in terms of value addition to the brand of the university.

Eligibility Criterion/Other pre-requisites

As per the statutory eligibility criterion (and for example the news in The Hindu dated 08 Aug 2015 about the selection for the Vice Chancellor for Delhi University); “The Vice Chancellor being Academic as well administrative Head, is expected to be a visionary with proven leadership qualities, administrative capabilities as well as teaching and research credentials. The candidate needs to have a minimum of 10 years' experience as a professor in a university or at an equivalent position in a research organisation. He or She should not be above 65 years of age. The appointment will be made from a panel recommended by the search – cum- selection committee. The notification regarding the constitution of the search-cum-selection panel will soon be issued by the HRD ministry.”

This is the standard format for meeting statutory eligibility criterion for selection and appointment as VC. There is no provision to validate other aspect as explained above / below. Following are few of the anomalies noticed in this system:-

- (i) Even the provision of 10 years' experience at an “equivalent position in a research organisation” takes the back seat. This provision is rarely utilised. This provision also does not stipulate the type of research or research organisation.
- (ii) It is not understood why the hard core engineering / management / finance professionals from the industries cannot be considered to lead the university? This practice is prevalent in many western countries and found to be very successful

and effective, as their approach is very professional and result oriented. Accountability is the key factor in their performance.

- (iii) In case of “State” universities, the Governor, as a Chancellor, is the final authority to select the candidate from the panel of names suggested by the Search-cum-selection panel. In principal, Governor again has to act on the “recommendations” from the State Cabinet headed by Chief Minister. Thus the entire process of selection and appointment of VC culminates in the process of “political patronage”. It is now an open secret known in the academic and political circles that VCs could be appointed after receipt of huge sums by the politicians. Inclusion of names of such “favoured” candidates being discretionary and thus can be “managed” by the “search panel”.
- (iv) In few states, IAS officers are also appointed as VCs of State Universities. This defeats the basic criterion of “Academic effectiveness and efficacy” of assignment of Vice Chancellor. Political interference thus may cause the non-reversible damage to the system of higher education.
- (vi) In one of the state in North India, number of private universities got established in very short period. The “open secret” was the “under the table payment” made by the promoters of such universities to the political system (say Chief Minister) in terms of Rs tens of crores.

Criteria of Age

This aspect generally is treated as “physical age” i.e. date of birth. There are all the possibilities that professionals younger than desired physical age could be physically unfit and those older than that would be much fitter and agile in their behaviour. But again there is an anomaly in considering age as a criterion while selecting and appointing a VC of University.

An extract of Karnataka State University Act 2010 states, “No person shall be appointed or hold office of the Vice Chancellor, if he has attained the age of sixty seven years.

The advertisement released by Min of HRD (Times of India 18 Sep 2014) inviting applications for the few Central universities mentions that, “The appointment will be on contractual basis for a period of 5 year or up to the age of 70 years, which is earlier.

For Vice Chancellors of few state universities one

cannot apply if s/he is above 65 years.

And in case of Deemed to be universities or Private Universities, there are no such restrictions.

The above details indicate that there is an anomaly for the criterion of age which is to be considered for the assignment of Vice Chancellor, when the responsibility remains the same irrespective of type of university viz state university, Central, deemed or private University.

C. Self-Management

Few of the issues related to “self-management” are deliberated as below:-

a. Ego Management

$$\text{Excellence/Quality} \propto \frac{1}{\text{Ego}}$$

It has been empirically proved that Excellence or Quality is inversely proportional to Ego. It has been observed on many occasions when VCs in chair resort to vulgar display of ego when invited to some platforms or even in their own office. Psychologists have time and again mentioned that ego kills the competence and efficiency of the professionals. At time it is also observed that the display is of “pseudo-ego” and not “pride”. This may be because of “opportunity” s/he has got to show her / his powers during the short tenure as Vice Chancellor. They desire to make full use of the opportunity. All of us must know that the humbleness is key to our success and real happiness. It is one of the quality indicator of the intellect and VCs are no exception to the same.

b. Stress Management

Even the normal routine functioning of any VC could be full of mental and physical stress. It may be due to sheer volume of table work, to attend various meetings, to meet the visitors, to meet the social and professional obligations, to meet all other types of stake holders, to bless the functions etc. Stress also gets built up if one does not meet the expectations from stake holders. But then one has to be prepared to accept these facts before even applying for the post of Vice Chancellor. Once selected and got appointed as Vice Chancellor, it is obligatory on the part of incumbent to remain cheerful always. This

cheerfulness will send clear signal across the system so that one and all under the control of university will follow the path. If this is not done, there will be no synergy in the campus or the working / functioning of the university.

On number of occasions it was observed that the VCs in chair give the impression of being fatigued, even at the start of the day. There is no pleasantness in the behaviour. This will also reduce the capability of “people management” during the functioning as VC.

c. Time Auditing and Management

This is the most frequently offered excuse by the incumbent VC that s/he does not get time. Files, proposals remain unattended for a long period due to want of time. Late working (beyond normal working hours) to clear “the files” create stress and leads to inefficiency. It also leads to lot of time being wasted in holding “meetings”.

The person holding the office has to audit the availability and utility of time at her / his disposal. S/he also has to identify and decide the methods to utilise the time judiciously. All out efforts are needed to weed out the time wasters.

One has to know the professional methods to audit the availability and then utilisation of time. This approach only will help to manage the time.

d. E.mail Etiquettes

Having a laptop or PC on the table is the most common sight in the officer of VC. This facility / provision is meant for speedy disposal of e.communication received at the desk of VC and also use of ICT tools. In today's context, having an e.mail ID and then receipt of e.mails is a common practice. VCs should encourage his staff, heads of institutions to resort to routine correspondence through this e.communication channel. This could result in speedy disposal of routine queries / clarifications or even the decisions.

It was observed on number of occasions that VCs themselves do not know as how to even operate the laptop. The most common and “shocking” practice observed is that PA or PS of VC are asked to operate the e.communication that is received through the e.mail ID of VC. They are asked to take out the printouts / hard copies (sic !!!!) and then put up to VC

in normal files. Majority of e.mails are seen and disposed as normal 'snail mails” and thus defeating the basic purpose of receiving them as e.mails.

Many VCs in chair do not even show minimum courtesy by acknowledging the receipt of e.mails.

It is thus strongly recommended that the incumbent must be computer literate and resort to vibrant and routine e.communication through the modes of e.mailing by resorting to proper e.mail etiquettes.

e. Self-progress

It is well known to all the professionals that Self progress is the continuous process and is neither related to seniority in service nor to the position one reaches. No one is exempt / expected to stop learning. Intellectual growth has to be continuous.

It was given a feeling on number of occasions that s/he had stopped learning or given a feeling that there was “no need” to learn any more. S/he has become the ultimate “learned”. It is felt that this is an unprofessional approach.

Asking subordinates to write articles / papers and publishing them with self as “co-author” is definitely not the method of intellectual contribution. Even only publishing the articles is not the sign of “continuous learning”. Remaining updated with the progress of technology is an essential part of “self-progress”.

Updating oneself on latest happenings in the world is also a part of self-progress.

D. Professional management

a. Professionalism

Oxford dictionary describes professionalism as “the qualities or typical features of a profession or of professionals, especially competence, skills etc. Competence and skills are not related only to academic excellence. This is related to professionals from all the domains.

Few of the simplest guidelines to bring-in excellence in professional life are:-

- (i) Remain a learner, always

(ii) Be ethical in your approach : This aspect will help one to project the image to all the stake holders of the system of higher education.

(iii) Be on time, always / Keep the given word, at any cost

(iv) Do not give excuse for any of your non-performance / do not blame anyone Else

(v) Reply in reasonable time, for any type of pointed communication received :

Generally VCs do have a functional “Secretariat” with more than one PAs or PSs. The post of VC is supposed to receive communication from all types of stake holders and s/he is expected to reply to all of them. The author has experienced that VCs in chair do not take pride in responding to communication received by they themselves. They do not respect the stature of the sender, as stake holder. Even receiving number of reminders do not work.

Even VCs in chair do not take the calls made through land lines and responses are conveyed through PAs unless the caller is the “boss” (of any type) or answering the call brings in some profit / advantage. The most repeatedly given reason is “no time”. Professionals are not supposed to give this lame excuse. Bosses are mandated to find time to do “multi-tasking” at all the times.

(vi) Be humble in approach : It has been experienced that this aspect is forgotten by the academician(s) immediately after taking over as VC. They were examples of humbleness before taking over as VC. Suddenly there is a sea change in the attitude.

(vii) Do not project your image bigger than what you are. Do not remain in past. It has been observed that all out efforts are made to project themselves bigger than the life size. The major methods used are (i) number of papers published (ii) number of countries visited (iii) number of seminars and conferences attended (iv) Size of the signature on e.mails etc. There is no response when pointedly asked as, “How many countries you have visited or conferences / seminars you had attended “with your own money”. Attending seminars / conferences or even visiting other countries at “some one's” expenses is not any achievement. It is a sarkari provision.

(viii) Always be a part of team, not above them

(ix) Use available resources for desired results >> No Creeping / No Excuses

(x) Have clear vision about your goals

(xi) Always think only about Excellence / Quality.

b. Manipulations

This is the most undesirable aspect of any professional. Manipulations are done when competency is of questionable nature; when confidence to perform is of questionable nature. It is an open secret and known to many of us about many academicians who have become VCs just by resorting to manipulations. Manipulation also involves “greasing the palms” of those who are in the position of power. The author has also met a person who took over VC for the second time just by manipulations (viz classmate of Chief Minister of the state, payment of huge donations to the party in power etc). Manipulators are always on lookout for “powerful connections” which will help them in time of dire need. There are also instances when someone who was not even included in “final panel” by the “search and selection panel” was appointed as VC of the University. Manipulations play its strong role.

Leadership

If we look around, you will observe that there are two types of “Leaders”:

i. Genuine Leaders

ii. YES-MEN (who Masquerade as Leaders)

There are tomes written on the subject of genuine leadership.

So let me say a few words on the second type of leadership where yes-men masquerade as leaders.

Let us call this Crony Leadership.

Many Human Resource (HR) Management Systems are designed to breed yes-men.

The selection system under deliberation ensures that yes-men are catapulted to the highest rungs of the hierarchy.

Now let us deliberate on the types of selection systems. The Selection Systems may be classified into two broad categories:

a. Promotion by competency

b. Promotion by MERIT

Selection by competency

Selection by ascertaining competency is the most transparent promotion system.

Competency is like Maternity. There is no scope for ambiguity as far as maternity is concerned. When a child is born there is no doubt as to who the mother is, since the baby is delivered directly from the mother's womb.

Likewise there is no scope for ambiguity about your competency.

It is strongly felt that rules and Regulations on how to determine competency are yet to be specified and framed for the system of higher education. As on date no university publishes clear cut policy on “competencies” from time to time so that every stake holder knows where selected and appointed VC stands.

Selection and appointment after ascertaining competency is the fairest, transparent and stress-free system as far as stake holders of the system of higher education are concerned.

Universities where selection and appointment is purely by “competency” and NOT “eligibility” will have harmony in the workplace because of the high degree of contentment in among all types of stake holders.

Selection by merit

The interpretation of the term “Merit” can be highly subjective and nebulous.

What is Merit?

Merit is like Paternity.

Yes – whereas “Competency” is like maternity – “Merit” is like Paternity.

In the case of maternity there is no scope for ambiguity.

In the case of paternity – there is plenty of scope for ambiguity.

There can always be a doubt as to who the real father of the baby is.

Sometimes – if she has been promiscuous – even the mother may not be sure who the real father of her baby is!

Hence – “Merit” is a highly subjective term – especially in the context of performance appraisal.

How is merit evaluated?

One may say that there are objective ways of determining merit.

For example – you can have an independent written examination and draw up an order of merit based on performance in the examination and promote from the top of the list appropriately (on the lines of the process for admission to IITs and IIMs via the IIT JEE and CAT Management Entrance Examinations). While this may work fine at the recruitment stage and for junior level employees – I don't think any organization (especially the university) can use such objective methods of determining merit for promotions at the higher levels of the hierarchy.

Can the merit be decided by verifying few facts mentioned in the biodata / CV and also the answers given during the personal interview? Both are highly prone to be manageable.

c. Communication

As known to all of us, the modes through which communication (personal or professional) is made are verbal, audio, body language, written, gestures etc. These are displayed as and when VCs are interacting with various types of stake holders at various occasions and platforms. At times keeping silent is also a mode of communication of “no comments”.

It is worth studying as to how many VCs in chair have mastered the art of “effective communication”. It has to be clearly understood that only through various types of communications, the university “brand” is projected to the outside world.

Besides control over the communication in vernacular language, one has to have equal control on effective communication in English too.

VCs are expected to be master of effective

communication and not master of mis-communication.

d. Honesty and Ethics

Now a days this aspect is taking a different dimension. There are cases (known to most of us) from various states in India where huge amounts were paid to politicians (up-front or behind the curtain) so that their names get included in the “panel” before making recommendations by the “well defined” search panel. As a statutory requirement, Governor of the state, as a Chancellor of the Universities in that state, has to “act” upon the “recommendations” made by the cabinet. It is a full proof game (and very difficult to challenge by anyone in the court of law). Use of discretionary powers of / by the state cabinet (of ministers) will be very difficult to challenge and proven in the court of law. Legally clear evidences will not be there to sustain your challenge.

In one of the University in India, the process of selection and appointment of Vice Chancellor was dragged for months just because the “earmarked” candidate has not come back to India from an assignment from Afghanistan. The university did not have VC for more than 6 months. And even on appointment he did not serve for the full term. I feel this falls under the gambit of ethical practices. Fullest use of political connections was exploited. And yes, he also did not satisfy “all” the criterion laid down to become VC of the state university. It is worth finding out under RTI Act as what role was played and which recommendations were made by the “search panel”.

Honesty is just not debatable when related to the functioning as VC. Honesty is not only in money matters but also to the basic charter and mandate to the working of VC. This issue could be the multiplier to summation of all the characteristics to be considered for appointing of VC of any university. If it is zero, the whole outcome has to be a big zero.

e. Humbleness

The oxford dictionary describes “humble” as, “having or showing a low estimate of one's own importance. This is the biggest challenge to the pure academician turned Vice Chancellor. Exactly opposite was observed in 100s of cases, especially in respect of first timers. Some sort of air gets into head even during the normal behaviour. Psychologist has termed this as “pseudo ego”. In majority of cases this

phenomenon happens when someone gets more than what s/he deserves. The sudden increase in the size of office space and “powers” hastens this process.

All sort of exaggerated / over-sized stories related to past (number of papers published, number of seminars attended etc etc) are quoted even in casual talks. But there is never a mention about what will be done (or contributed) during the immediate future or what are the well-defined executable plans to use these intellect and make all the graduating students employable, who are studying in various constituent or affiliated colleges. Maximum efforts are made to be in past and depict one in the size larger than life size.

f. Use of ICT in day-to-day functioning

Use of ICT in a day to day affairs has become most common today. No one can stay away from the avalanche of technology and its positive effect in the domain of education. Computer literacy is the first step in this direction. It is strongly felt that being well versed with at least MS Office (MS word, MS Excel and MS Power point) is mandatory even for the VCs in chair. The pseudo feeling of high status by using PAs and PSs for even replying the routine e.mails could be given away. Even effective management of Google Calendar by VC him / her self could give all the details of day to day engagements and assignments, without depending on PA or PS. Preparing a presentation using power point is a fun as well as method of self-development. MS Excel definitely exceeds your expectations in minor computing.

PAs taking out and placing the “hard copies” of the “soft e.mails” to VCs is a common sight in many universities. It is total contrast when one talks about use of ICT in higher education.

End Result

Thus it will be evident that there are many hidden qualities which are not tested or there is no provision to test them before someone is assessed and then appointed as VC of a university. Without this provision there are all the chances that incompetents get identified, processed, selected and also appointed thus resulting in just no contribution from them through their tenure or causing irreversible damage to the entire university system.

As is well known to and accepted by all of us, the system of higher education is suffering from “Quality

disorder". Universities are churning out degree holders and not "employable / job ready graduates". Number of reasons will be and could be given by the heads of the universities in support of constraints on their part. But then ways could be found out only when competent academicians and administrators are identified, invited, selected and then appointed to do needful.

It is felt that there is an urgent need on the part of universities (read Vice Chancellors of the Universities) to make it mandatory to make a special mention on the degree certificate itself to the effect that, "We the members of management / academic council of this university further certify that this degree holder has become employable on this day" or the suitable words to that effect. Such certification should be in its spirit and not legally perfect. Just award of degree on a piece of paper (without assurance of any type of quality or competence) is not going to suffice "the" purpose for which the students join the system of higher education.

If all the Vice Chancellors of various universities in India have been selected and appointed on purely their academic and administrative competence, then it is also worth asking every one of them about their specifically designed efforts to bring in even one university amongst the top 200 – 300 in the world. Only a statement like "I was a Vice Chancellor of XYZ university" will have no worthwhile significance to mention.

E. General

There are few more issues which are closely associated with the process of selection and felt to be not in accordance with the spirit of process for the selection of Vice Chancellors and worth deliberating here.

- a) No TA / DA paid to the candidates called for interview

While calling the nearly finalised candidates for the personal interview by the search panel, it is specifically mentioned that no Travelling / daily allowances will be paid to the candidates. Are they not expected to be given respect as "worth candidates" for the post of Vice Chancellors? By the time they have been called for personal interview, they must have satisfied all other "mandatory" criterion. It is just not agreeable that provision for such small amount could

not be made in the budget of university. Think about the efforts those were put in by the applying / aspiring candidates to customise / prepare the CV / application in the given format and then send by courier 4 to 5 hard copies along with all the attachments. Are these worth thrown in the dust bean without even acknowledgement?

Why then only the members of the search panel be paid high quality hospitality and also TA + DA? Are they someone really special in status? They are also academicians selected for a purpose.

- b) No acknowledgment / reply "why someone has been rejected"

Many eligible / aspiring professionals / academicians apply when advertisement for calling applications for the post of Vice Chancellor is released / published in newspapers or in any e.media. Generally they all are senior professionals and who generally satisfy nearly all statutory compliance in terms of eligibility criteria. But the process finally selects only one. But the system should not undermine competence of other "not selected" and "NOT rejected" just because there was no provision to select more than one. It has been observed that there is no practice to intimate others about the "reasons" for not selecting them. Once the process of selection of one person is over, others are not even respected for their "application". Other applicants are kept in dark till the announcement is made for the selection of "one". Reasons (or even a courteous intimation) for others not getting selected are never intimated. It is felt that this logic will be argued by many but then "good / ethical practices" are needed to be followed by all the universities.

- c) No list of runners up those could be recommended for the other universities.

There is no provision in the system of selection of Vice Chancellors to enlist "runners up" or "stand by" candidates. At times, the selected candidates either may not finally take over at the last moment or s/he may not serve for the full tenure of Vice Chancellor announced at the time of selection. Instead of restarting the entire process once again, the "stand by" candidates could be asked to take over to save the time and money already spent on selection of Vice Chancellor.

The names of the "runners up" could also be

considered by other universities

Conclusion

Real time situation

It is agreed that it is very difficult to legally prove the reality on ground. At many places it is the “hidden agenda”, “political connections”, “capability to manipulate”, “capability to cough out huge amounts in return to favours received”, “capability to manage” the things which are against the interest of system of higher education etc.

Frequent media reports of increasing numbers of aggrieved academicians, serving and retired, going to tribunals and courts to seek justice in promotion related cases clearly indicates that the present system has become antiquated and needs to be revamped and brought in sync with aspirations of present-day professionals, by incorporating modern management practices.

In fact – the entire process of selection and appointment of VC is done in a “cloak and dagger” manner – and this generates an atmosphere of suspense, anxiety and intrigue. Your “morals” too must be flexible – and your “ethics” must change – to suit the “ethics” of your system.

Yes – being an “ethical chameleon” is the sine qua non for becoming a “yes-man”.

Thus – we see that in the system of higher education – in the implementation of HR Management Systems (read selection and appointment of Vice Chancellor) – “merit” actually becomes “pseudo merit” – and the promotion system – though ostensibly based on “promotion by merit” – degenerates into “promotion by preference”.

This results in an atmosphere of favouritism which breeds cronyism and sycophancy – and throws up yes-men to leadership positions.

And when yes-men become leaders – what we get is crony leadership.

As Richard Burke said:

“Like begets like (e.g., ducks pick ducks), and inadequate personnel, once they have moved up sufficiently to be on a selection board, will themselves be apt to select other inadequate personnel”.

Thus – yes-men will promote yes-men

And – these yes-men in turn will promote more “like minded” yes-men. The process continues unabated.

This will have a spiralling effect. And this “yes-man-ship” driven selection and appointment process will proliferate till the “top brass” is flooded with “yes-men” and we will have an overwhelming crony leadership.

Is there a solution? Of course there is.

Modern Human Resource (HR) Management Practices (including those applicable to the present system of higher education) to be well researched and documented and I am sure that all the so called “management experts” in the system of higher education are also to be well aware of these.

Today's process needs immediate corrective surgery! (and not the mild and slow working medication). Detailed diagnosis is already with all of us.