



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

Research is a continuous process in higher educational institutions due to many reasons which include, identification of new problems to be solved in a given area, creation of new knowledge in a given subject, interconnecting and interrelating different subjects, identifying new skills, ideas, concepts, theories, developing new technologies and systems which makes life more comfortable, finding the relationship between various variables of a system in an effort to simplify it, deepening insight into a system or method with an intention of discovering new things, etc. Like other organizations which have the objective of enhancing their productivity or quality of service for long-term benefits, higher education institutions also have to struggle to enhance their output or performance which is mainly creating and disseminating new knowledge through research and publications. This can be achieved by including both faculty members and students actively in research. ‘Theory A’ on organizational performance has been found to be applicable for enhancing research productivity. The theory focuses on creativity as an inherent urge, responsibility as fulfilling target and accountability as commitment and role model as motivation for improved performance. This paper discusses the methodical sequence and outlines the challenges and opportunities for research and publications in higher educational institutions.

Index Terms: Enhancement of Research Publications, Challenges for Research & Publications, Opportunities to Enhance Research & Publications, Theory A & ABC Model of Research Productivity.

1. Introduction:

The two major objectives of the higher education system are (1) innovation in teaching and learning process to enhance the knowledge, skills, and learning experience of students, and (2) creating new knowledge through research and publications to improve the quality of life in the society [1-2]. The present education system has developed many tools and techniques to focus on the first through active participation and involvement of students in the higher education goal implementation model. Accordingly, many research papers have been published on innovations and best practices in higher education for improvement of the quality of education [3-33]. The second goal of higher education i.e., creating new knowledge, can be realized by the active involvement of all faculty members in research. Organizations in higher education can redefine their objectives to improve their research contribution in the form of annual research output. Recently one model of measuring annual research output/ productivity of higher educational institutions namely ABC model has been proposed [34-36]. According to this model, one can measure annual research index of an organization by knowing the number of publications in peer-reviewed journals (A), number of subject related books published with ISBN number (B), and number of chapters/case studied published (C) for a given year. Such yardstick used to measure the research productivity of higher educational institutions converted the measurement of research output of higher educational institutions from intangible estimates to tangible scale. This creates the real challenge to the institutions to showcase their research output/ productivity in terms of the tangible result. ABC model of measuring research productivity has created an alarm for showcasing their research output based on pseudo-quality and intangible measurement systems. For example, measuring the quality of research based on number of citations it received is a long term procedure and not a practical method to immediate measurement for research quality [37-46]. In such scenario, it is challenging for higher educational institutions to set their organizational objectives and motivate the students and faculty members to involve in research by giving equal importance to research along with teaching [47]. While suggesting solutions to such challenges of increasing the research productivity, it has been found that Theory of organizational performance namely Theory A (Theory of Accountability) could be applied [48-52]. In this paper, we have discussed the challenges and opportunities for organizations to enhance research and publications using the postulates and essential components of Theory A.

2. Essential Components of Theory A:

Planning: Creation of new knowledge and using it for organizational progress should be a central activity for any higher educational institution. The vision, mission, and objectives of the organization should be clear on organizational contribution towards research and development. Being the first element of the theory of Accountability, planning finds a very important role in transforming a higher education organization into an active research institution for optimized contribution from employees. By setting the objectives of the

organization, an organization can encourage its employees to think innovatively. Based on planning organizational objectives the organization can recruit and train its members to be innovative with a passion for research and documentation. The organization can develop its planning strategy as the blue ocean to become a monopoly in its business. Among the various steps to be followed in planning include individually or jointly analysing the institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, identifying the problems in transforming the organization into a highly productive organization in research contribution and publication, recruiting right resources in all positions to fuel the research objectives and developing a clear training policy. Planning should also involve allocation of financial resources to promote various research centres, research groups, research projects, and financial support for various activities related to enhancing organizational research output and publications.

Target: Target setting includes setting the research target for the organization, for various divisions, groups, and individuals. Target can be set for the entire number of Research centres in the organization, number of projects to be applied for funding, number peer reviewed publications, the number of books to be published, etc. during a given year. Based on the institutional research policy, the targets could be fixed for quarterly, half yearly, annually, and so on. Such target should be communicated to everyone in the organization. This stimulates a process of mutual consultation and dialogue. As a result, the members realize their challenge and learn to redefine their individual and group goal. The target setting for individuals and groups makes everybody prepare and devote their effort towards better performance. The target should focus on what research topics have to be explored, research projects have to be applied and papers to be published during a given year.

Motivation: The basic intention of motivation in Theory A is to help members to discover their own potential through self-exploration. Once the target for optimum research and publication is set, the organizational leaders should develop and implement various policies to support researchers to meet the targets. Motivation may include support to identify research problems, providing financial support for research expenditures, appreciation of good performers as role models, providing library and internet facility for extended hours, encouragement for collaborative research, publication support, developing research-based curriculum, patent support, both financial and career advancement support for better performer etc.

Work Strategies: Strategy is important for success. First and foremost, it is important that the members of the organization to set their individual goals in consonance with the organizational goal. This comes in the form of a desire. A time-frame plan is essential for individuals and groups to accomplish their target. Collaborating with many people and with many organizations and working on a number of projects and papers simultaneously is another strategy. Redefining the target based on successive fulfillment and getting organizational support to fulfill the target is an enabling strategy.

Responsibility: This is the major component of both individual and organizational success. When the researchers show their responsibility towards fulfilling the organizational objective which is enhancing the research productivity through improved publications, no other influencing factors are required for the better performance by groups and individuals. But based on personality type, only a few people take responsibility by themselves in any organization. For others, an external stimulus is required to point out their responsibilities. Such stimuli may be helping to set the target, motivation, continuous follow-up, showcasing role model or encouragement.

Role Model: Role models can be anybody in the organization who outperform in research and contribute highest research output for the organization. Irrespective of age, gender, position and any kind of administrative responsibilities, role models can inspire every researcher in the organization and prove that higher research productivity is possible irrespective of any organizational and individual constraints. By appreciating and showcasing research output, organizations can set a higher target for all researchers. Super researchers can be the inspiration for every researcher in higher education institutions.

Monitoring: Continuously monitoring the research and publication process and accelerating the research and publication productivity is essential to the leaders of the institution. This will automatically create responsibility and avoid procrastination nature of the faculty members and research students. The process of monitoring the research and publication process include both self-monitoring and monitoring by superiors. Monitoring of progress on research and publication can be done by the superiors by means of conducting weekly meetings, periodic faculty presentations and giving deadlines through institutional conferences or inviting papers for special issues of institutional journals.

Accountability: While designing curriculum for higher education courses, the institution should give special focus on a research-based curriculum where one or two papers should be added based on research and publications so that research atmosphere can be created among everybody in the organization. Performance-based incentives for the faculty researchers and publication based grades for the students will add accountability for both faculty researchers and student researchers. Research and publication accountability should be fixed to everybody including the heads of the departments and director of the organization so that satisfactory justice can be maintained throughout the organization. Depending on the organizational policy, the accountability may be positive or negative for achievers or losers respectively.

3. Challenges for Research/Publications:

Organizational Challenges:

(i) Objectives: Setting objectives is important for the institution to embark on a meaningful pursuit to achieving the realizable target. The quality of teaching and learning has to be upgraded, norms for practice have to be set and a culture of learning has to be built through inspiration and example. This is possible if the fundamental objectives are defined suitably to give thrust to research. All members of the institution should share it for the persistent result.

(ii) Budget: Allocating seed money for initiating studies and fulfilling financial implications of research by way of the well-conceived budget are important challenges.

(iii) Competitive Environment: The organization should create a healthy but competitive environment conducive to the advancement of knowledge. Each member of the institution should be distinguished through their research and publications. There should be sufficient scope for co-operation and collaboration but at the same time, a spirit of competition should prevail in the entire organization.

(iv) Industrial Support: Collaboration with industry is necessary for institutions to evolve new and better understanding of human problems relating to productivity and expanding knowledge and sharing will sustain the industrial support.

(v) Research Funding Environment: Promotion of research through consultancy and sponsorship from various establishments could serve to gear up research and publications.

(vi) Government Policies: Government policies conducive to research promotion includes mandatory research qualifications for faculty promotions and pay raise, research projects, and teaching as part of the curriculum, more liberal allocation of funds exclusive to research, conferences and seminars, recognition of institutions based on research performances etc.

(vii) Institutional Brand: Institution which establishes their footprint in research and publications can improve their image and establish their own brand and stand differently from others.

(viii) Course Admission Strategy: Admission to courses should follow preferences for research and learning. Curriculum, as well as pedagogy, should incorporate such elements which would boost critical thinking and spirit of inquiry. Scientific temper has to be cultivated among students. Bridge courses and short courses in modular form should bridge the gap of learning of enrolled students to enhance admission strategy.

(ix) Patenting: Exclusive contributions in the form of ideas and products should be patented to acknowledge the efforts of the institution and institutional grading should take it into account the number of patents.

Head/Directors Challenges:

(i) Faculty Motivation: It is not likely that most faculty would venture into research and publication unless they are strongly motivated by their own leader. It could take place in the form of giving them the opportunity, guidance, support, inspiration, and reward. The head of the institution creates the context, keeps the relevance and imbibe the spirit of participation for faculty contribution. A weak leader will always have poor performers following him.

(ii) Self-Contribution: 'Walk the talk' is all what the head of the institution shall be doing. He just not only preaches but practices what he preaches. He sets an example to others by leading them from the front.

(iii) Mobilizing Resources: Time, money, effort and infrastructure are some of the essential resources which need to be mobilized. This is a conscious and deliberate action which is dependent on the head of the institution.

(iv) Curriculum Orientation: The relevance of research in the curriculum is not just incidental or coincidental, but it is created to orient the learners.

(v) Research Centres: Research centres are smaller hubs where each faculty leads an area or field of study and comes up with working papers which essentially add to their contribution and pursuit.

(vi) Sectoral Collaboration: Being in a position of command, the head of the institution engage in collaboration with other institutions, industries or agencies to offer services of his team in the direction of consultancy services.

Faculty's/Researcher's Challenges:

(i) Identifying Research Topics: An inquisitive mind is always looking for questions to reflect and get the answer. Both the question and the answer comes from his surroundings. A good beginning is half done is what is true of identifying a topic for research.

(ii) Data Collection: Extensive literature review is part of data collection so much so that collecting primary information ought to be. Many times during such reviews, the researchers stumble on a good topic or get chances to modify his study.

(iii) Funded Projects: Fund is a major constraint especially for those whose work is based on laboratory experimentation or primary data collection from a large number of units in an extended universe. It is worth to mention that the famous physicist Einstein who propounded many great theories on the origin of the universe had nothing more than a few pieces of paper in his lab.

(iv) Involving Students: The future of learning is in the hands of the learners. It depends on what the learners would do with what they have learned. It is to be said that learning never ends and preparing students to be lifelong learners is what the actual task is.

(v) Art of Publications: The manner of the putting the information in the appropriate way to make it a research publication is a felt problem to overcome.

Role Model's Challenges:

(i) Showcasing as Role Models: Role model is a key ingredient of 'Theory A' of organizational research productivity. Best performers are inspirational role models who serve as examples for others. Since the role model is expected to maintain a high profile and the consistency, the task in hand is also great.

(ii) Involving in Big Projects: Projects carry immense research potentials. Involving in projects can provide a lead for role models. But usually such projects are not easy in forthcoming and this acts to the difficulty of the role model to maintain himself as a front runner.

(iii) Collaborating: The role model can evoke positive response through persuasion and support for increased collaboration with other members of his team.

(iv) Organizing Conferences & Research Workshops: Conferences and workshops are avenues for new knowledge creation. They offer chances of sharing and learning in fields that are of interest to the researchers. Role model's task is to organize such events periodically. Organizing conference/seminar involves performing a series of activities. This keeps him engaged round the clock, and demands high energy level.

4. Opportunities for Research/Publications:

Organizational Opportunities:

(i) Objectives: Changes in the vision/mission, organizational objectives, setting up of research goals- both organizational and individual, could give more mileage in encashing opportunities.

(ii) Budget: Anticipating output, forecasting needs, extensive low budget studies, modest share of corpus fund etc. are some opportunities to improve.

(iii) Competitive Environment: Providing encouragement and reward, conducive learning environment and assigning research as part of academic responsibility would enhance the competitiveness of the environment.

(iv) Industrial Support: All measures to foster industry-institution interface could enhance industry support.

(v) Research funding environment : Research aptitude in staff recruitment, eminent and scholarly academician with publications as head of the institution, obtaining more projects and consultancies, socio-economic research studies and evaluation and impact studies as part of CSR etc. can improve research funding environment.

(vi) Government Policies: Efforts to promote research and publications in all institutions of higher education through grants, awards and rewards should be part of government policies.

(vii) Institutional Brand: Creation of new knowledge through research and publications as a sole criterion for institutional ranking will enable brand building and distinguishing.

(viii) Course Admission Strategy: Incorporating research in all courses, selection of students with research aptitude and winning stakeholder's satisfaction in enrollment are part of course admission strategy.

(ix) Patenting: Discouraging plagiarism, more freedom, creativity, and expression will favour patenting original works.

Head/Directors Opportunities:

(i) Faculty Motivation: Identify talent, nurture, focus attention on slow-goers, encourage good performers, grow them into role models, create healthy competition and facilitate career advancement. Recognition and rewards associated with research publications are some of the opportunities for the head of the institution to materialize.

(ii) Self Contribution: Identify new fields, demonstrate through own performance, enter into new collaboration, obtain more projects, expand existing networks, gather resources, provide more opportunities, create conducive environment etc.

(iii) Mobilizing Resources: Obtain funding, effectively utilize infrastructure, negotiate with top management, convince situations, and win confidence, pool external resources, contact publishers, work out contracts and agreements, ensure timely publications etc.

(iv) Curriculum Orientation: Device new courses, strengthen curriculum inputs, improve pedagogy, promote student projects, ensure effective guidance etc.

(v) Research Centres: Form new research centres, activate existing ones, plan and executing, fix responsibility, ensure timely working papers, and follow-up.

(vi) Sectorial Collaboration: Take opinion and advice from industry employers, know their needs, tailor plans to requirements, sign MOU for extended collaboration, negotiate consultancy, build cordiality, and elicit support.

Faculties/Researchers Opportunities:

(i) Identifying Research Topics: Choose interest areas, attend external conferences, participate in methodology workshops, adopt new themes, follow new styles, interrelate studies, consult colleagues, share the interest, learn and collaborate, and diversify to different domains.

(ii) Data Collection: Gather bibliography, consult new references, frame topics with data potential, incorporate existing studies, process information, present properly, and maintain originality.

(iii) Funded Projects: Identifying agencies, preparing proposals, knowing priorities, picking opportunity, submission to agencies, corresponding, securing approvals, sanctioning funds, handling, conducting studies, ensuring timely progress, preparing reports, finalizing, submitting, extracting publications, etc. are opportunities open to the faculties.

(iv) Involving Students: Students have to be involved in research and publications by utilizing opportunities through stimulating their interest, supporting them, presenting in conferences, conducting first-hand studies combining with student research projects etc.

(v) Art of Publications: Learning by doing is the best way to learn the art of publication. Take up opportunities, draw themes, prepare write-ups, get help and guidance, learn the art from other published materials etc.

Role Models Opportunities:

(i) Showcasing as Role Models: The role model is a star performer, and anyone should aspire become so. Don't let opportunities to be wasted. Consistent effort and persistent spirit are important.

(ii) Involving in Big Projects: Many organizations are desirous of seeking consultancy. Also, research funding is part of the ongoing activities of many regulatory bodies and councils. Use prudence and attempt to secure such opportunities.

(iii) Collaborating: Lazy colleagues could be inspired better by the role model. Reach out to others and build a team. Teams are more productive as they give synergy.

(iv) Organizing Conferences & Research Workshops: It should be a regular activity to conduct conferences and workshops for institutions involved in higher education at periodic intervals. This is a fertile ground for promoting research and publications. The role model can initiate and carryout such activities.

5. Conclusion:

Organizational performance in terms of Theory 'A' puts accountability at the forefront through shared understanding of individual and group goals. A complementarity of individual goal and organizational goal are important. In the context of the higher educational institution, in order to meet their prime objective namely new knowledge creation, this assumes significance in mobilizing faculty and students in a conducive environment of motivation for creativity. Planning is essential to target setting, responsibility is the product of target setting, role model induces motivation, work strategy simplifies target attainment and monitoring helps to ensure accountability. The challenges and the opportunities discussed here open new vistas in promoting research productivity in higher educational institutions.

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