

## An Understanding of Concepts of Line, Staff and Auxiliary in Organization

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**Abstract:** According to L. D. White [1926], the business of government is transacted by means of an elaborate organization held together in a universal superior – subordinate relationship, and based on the principles of specialization. The central hierarchy comprises (a) the line; assisting the line are various units; some concerned with advisory and preparatory operations, known as staff, some concerned with house – keeping operations describes as the auxiliary agencies.

**Keywords:** business of government, elaborate organization, universal superior – subordinate relationship, principles or organization, line, staff and other auxiliary

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### I. Introduction

According to the literature available, the administrative organization of government institutions generally consists of **three types of agencies**, namely, **line, staff and auxiliary**. The distinction that exists between those three organization units lies in the nature of work performed by them. All this constitutes the subject matter of this article.

### II. Purpose Of Article

The purpose is to **define** and **illustrate** the differences between **line, staff and auxiliary** and their interdependence.

### III. Line And Staff

#### 3.1 Meanings

The administrative organization of government consists of three types of agencies, namely, line, staff and auxiliary. The distinction between these three organizational units lies in the nature of work done by them. The line agencies directly work for the achievements of the organizational purpose, the staff agencies advise and assist the line agencies in their activities, and the auxiliary agencies provide common house – keeping services to the line agencies.

According to L. D. White, the business of government is transacted by means of an elaborate organization held together in a universal superior – subordinate relationship, and based on the principle of specialization. The central hierarchy comprises *the line; assisting the line are various units*, some concerned with *advisory and preparatory operations*, known as *staff*, some concerned with *house – keeping operations* described as the auxiliary agencies. The line comprises the central element of any administrative system; staff and *auxiliary agencies* are necessary in a large and complex organization, but they are secondary. They serve the line. The distinction between line and staff in public administration is adopted from the military administration where it was developed first.

#### 3.2 Views of scholars

The following views expressed by various scholars clearly bring out the line staff distinction and its relevancy

**Pfiffner and Presthus:** in general the distinction between staff and line follows that between direct and indirect labour, the direct line and the indirect staff

**Oliver Sheldon:** The staff organization may be described as a deliberate organization for thought, just as the line organization is the organization for execution

**Dimock, Dimock and Koieng:** Staff and line coordinates, operating not in a hierarchical relation to staff over line, but on a horizontal plane of authority and responsibility under the chief executive. A staff man who does not give commands to the line is ineffectual and a line man who does not understand and exercise a modicum of staff function is a failure

**Koontz and O'Donnell:** Line and staff are characterizations of authority relationships and not departmental activities.

### **1.3 Line agencies**

There are four types of line agencies in public administration

- Government departments
- Public corporations
- Government companies
- Independent regulatory commission IRC

The first three are found in all the countries of the world while the last one is a special feature of the administrative system of USA.

The line agencies have the following characteristic features

- i. They directly carry out the function of accomplishing the sustenance of the organization.
- ii. They are given authority to make decisions and issue orders and directives
- iii. They directly come in contact with the people and provide them various services, regulate conduct, and collect taxes.

Thus, the line agencies are executive in nature and are subordinate divisions of operating responsibility working under the direct control, direction, and supervision of the chief executive.

According to **L. D. White**, major functions of the line agencies include:

- making decision
- taking responsibility
- interpreting and defending policy and operations
- maintaining production and seeking efficiency and economy.

### **1.4 Staff agencies**

The important staff agencies of the government of India are:

1. Cabinet secretariat
2. Prime minister's office
3. Cabinet committees
4. Planning commission
5. Department of economic affairs
6. Administrative vigilance division
7. Staff inspection unit

The staff agencies have the following characteristic features.

1. They perform secondary or supportive functions, that is, assist the line in the accomplishment of organizational purpose.
2. They do not have the authority to make decisions and issue orders and directives. Their role is advisory in nature and they exercise some influence rather than authority
3. They do not come in contact with people directly. They function anonymously. According to the Brownlow committee of USA (1937), the staff should have a passion for anonymity

According to **Mooney**, the staff agencies perform three functions

- i. Informative function, that is, collection and provision of information to the chief executive, research, study and enquiry.
- ii. Advisory function, that is, advising the chief executive on making decisions
- iii. Supervisory function that is, seeing that the chief executive's decision is implemented by the line agencies concerned.

**Pfiffner** says that the staff agencies perform the following functions

- i. Advising, teaching and consultation
- ii. Coordination
- iii. Fact finding and research
- iv. Contact and liaison
- v. Assisting the line
- vi. Exercising delegated authority from line

vii. Planning

**L. D. White** has mentioned the following functions of staff agencies

1. to ensure that the chief executive is adequately and currently informed
2. to assist him in foreseeing problems and planning future programmes
3. to ensure that matters for his decision reach his desk promptly and to protect him against any hasty or ill – considered judgments
4. to exclude every matter that can be settled elsewhere in the system
5. to protect his time
6. to secure means of ensuring compliance by subordinates with established policy and executive direction

According to **Mooney**, the staff is an expansion of the personality of the executive. It means more eyes, more ears, and more hands to aid him in forming and carrying out his plans. Pfiffner and Presthus have described that staff as the alterego of the chief executive.

According to **Pfiffner**, staff agencies are of three kinds, namely

- i. The general staff, which assist the chief executive in his administrative work, generally by advice, collection of information, research, and so on. The fundamental purpose of general staff is to act as a filter and funnel to the chief executive
- ii. The technical staff, which advises the chief executive in technical matters and exercises functional supervision. It is also known as special staff or function staff
- iii. The auxiliary staff, which provide common housekeeping services to the line agencies.

However, **L. D. White and Willoughby** do not include the auxiliary agencies under the category of staff agencies (auxiliary staff) and consider them as a separate and distinctive unit. White calls them as auxiliary services, while Willoughby refers to them as institutional or housekeeping services, John Gaus calls them auxiliary – technical staff services.

### **3.5 Auxiliary agencies**

The important auxiliary agencies of the government of India are:

- Central public works department
- Law ministry/finance ministry/information and broadcasting ministry
- Union public service commission
- Parliamentary affairs department
- Director – general of supply and disposal

Like staff agencies, the auxiliary agencies also assist the line agencies in the accomplishment of organizations purpose and do not come in contact with the people. But, they differ from the staff agencies in the following respects.

- i. The staff agencies advise the line agencies, while the auxiliary agencies provide common housekeeping services to the line agencies.
- ii. The staff agencies have no operating responsibilities, while the auxiliary agencies do have operating responsibilities.
- iii. The staff agencies do not exercise authority and do not make decisions, while the auxiliary agencies exercise limited authority and make decision in their own sphere.
- iv. The staff agencies have multiple functions and wider jurisdiction than auxiliary agencies which are concerned with maintaining the line agencies

### **3.6 Line staff conflicts**

Though line and staff units are indispensable in all government organizations and are meant to complement each other, the relationship between them is not always cordial and happy. The relations in practice between line and staff units are characterized by conflicts, clashes, tensions, suspicions and so on. The reasons for such a conflicting situation are as follows;

- i. The staff agency, being close to the chief executive, tend to usurp the authority of the agency
- ii. The differences between line and staff officials in terms of age, status, outlook, experience, technical competence, and so on.
- iii. The staff people usually adopt ivory-tower approach, that is, they suggest unrealistic plans and ideas to the line people who are more practical in their approach. Consequently, they do not care much to such suggestions, leading to misunderstanding and tension between the two.
- iv. The tendency of the line officials to disown responsibility and blame the staff officials for mistakes

- v. The staff officials tend to discover the deficiencies in the work and procedures of line authorities.

Measures to reduce the conflict, rivalry and rancor in line – staff relationship are:-

- i. The chief executive should clearly specify the nature of responsibilities of line and staff people. This enables him to hold them responsible for their mistakes
- ii. The opportunities to exchange roles should be created, that is, there should be periodic transfer between the line and staff
- iii. The chief executive should encourage both to get better acquainted with each other as well as with their mutual roles. He should highlight the desirability of close relationship between line and staff officials for accomplishing organizational purpose and objectives
- iv. The line people should be given training in staff work and vice – versa. This enables them to know the proper aspects and dimension of their duties and responsibilities.

Moreover, matrix organization can be adopted to overcome the problem of line – staff controversy.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

From the study, it is concluded that the administrative organization of government consisting of three types of agencies, namely, line, staff, these three organizational units lies in the nature of work performed by them, that is,

- line agencies directly work for the achievement of the organizational purpose;
- staff agencies advise and assist the line agencies, and
- the auxiliary agencies provide common house – keeping services to the line agencies.

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