Difference Between Unity of Command and Unity of Direction

Key Difference - Unity of Command vs Unity of Direction

Unity of command and unity of direction are two important aspects to consider in an organizational hierarchy. The key difference between unity of command and unity of direction is that **unity of command states that each employee is accountable to one supervisor or manager from whom the employee receives orders relating to the duties to be performed** whereas **unity of direction explains that a group of activities that have the same objective should be performed as per a single plan and supervised by one manager**. Both concepts were introduced by Mining engineer of France, Henry Fayol.

What is Unity of Command?

Unity of command states that each employee is accountable to one supervisor or manager from whom the employee receives orders, relating to the duties to be performed. Unity of command ignores dual subordination since one employee cannot report to more than one supervisor. The person to whom the employee is responsible for and is directly reporting is referred to as the 'immediate supervisor' or 'immediate boss'. Unity of command is a very effective way of controlling subordinates and leads to less confusion and complexity. Performance evaluation of the subordinates are also made convenient through unity of command.

However, unity of command is only applicable to organizations with a traditional hierarchy. The matrix structure is a type of organizational structure where employees are grouped concurrently by two different operational dimensions.This means that a matrix structure combines two organizational structures, most commonly a functional structure and a divisional structure. This type of organizational structure leads to dual subordination where the subordinates are accountable for two managers.

E.g. UTH is an engineering firm that produces electronic devices. It has a Research and Development (R&D) function where the employees report to a R&D manager. UTH decided to undertake a project with another engineering company in

collaboration to design a new prototype. This will require some of the employees to report to a project manager in addition to the R&D manager.
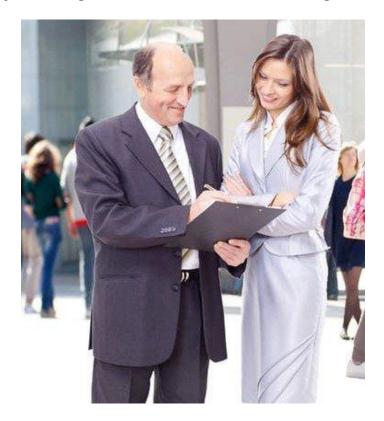

Figure 01: Unity of command is used to provide clear instructions to subordinates.

What is Unity of Direction?

Unity of direction explains that a group of activities that have the same objective should be performed as per a single plan and supervised by one manager. This is done to ensure that there is proper goal congruence and one vision where all the employees will work under the guidance of one manager. Proper coordination of activities in a timely manner is essential here and deviations from the plan (unless due to sudden changes of customer demand or unforeseen circumstance) are not acceptable. The success of unity of direction often depends on proper understanding of the interrelationships between the activities and managing them in an effective manner. Considering the above example,

E.g. the project to design the new prototype is done according to a single plan with a specific objective where all the employees report to the project manager

While unity of direction is considered essential for the achievement of a goal, sometimes it may not be practically attainable as per theory. This can happen due

to the size of the project or specific task where if it is of massive scale, it may not be manageable by a single manager.

Figure 02: In unity of direction, manger and subordinates work towards a common goal.

What is the difference between Unity of Command and Unity of Direction?

Unity of Command vs Unity of Direction	
Unity of command states that each employee is accountable to one supervisor or manager from whom the employee receives orders, relating to the duties to be performed.	Unity of direction explains that a group of activities that have the same objective should be performed as per a single plan and supervised by one manager.
Main Purpose	
Main purpose of unity of command is to avoid dual subordination.	Achieving a particular outcome effectively is the main purpose of unity of direction.
Relationship	
The relationship between manager and subordinate is depicted by unity of command.	Unity of direction is focused on exploring relationships between different activities that should be performed to achieve an objective.

Focus	
Unity of command focuses on a single employee.	Unity of direction focuses on the entire organization.

Summary - Unity of Command vs Unity of Direction

The difference between unity of command and unity of direction can be understood based on whether it is applied based on individual employee (unity of command) or for the organization as a whole (unity of direction). Furthermore, these two concepts also vary according to their purpose; unity of command is designed to provide clear responsibilities for employees whereas unity of direction is focused on goal congruence in achieving an objective.

References:

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