Does University Administrative System Link to the Life world of Academics?

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Abstract: The concept of life world and system are widely used by Habermas in Theory of Communicative action. TCA applied for investigating the university administrative system in Sri Lanka from the perspective of stakeholder, the main objective of this study is to explore the relationship between system and the life world of academic staff and how does it impact on each other. This empirical study was undertaken as a qualitative embedded single case study strategy to investigate this phenomenon, and adopted in the critical constructive nature of research philosophy. Accordingly, based on the empirical evidence of the study, it is concluded that the bureaucratic system practiced in state universities overruns the life world of academics and other stakeholders

I.   INTRODUCTION

Within the literature the concept of lifeworld has signified the pattern of societal action. According to the communicative action theory, the cultural, personal, and social life of the individual converges into his/her lifeworld. The concept of the 'lifeworld' ('slebenswelt' in German) comes from phenomenology, particularly from the work of Husserl and Schutz. Habermas gave it his own specific meaning. Habermas brings a narrower meaning to lifeworld than Husserl and Schutz. The system is defined as a process which incorporates different aspects such as the language system and the behavioural system. The system is therefore embedded in the lifeworld, and in Habermas' words, colonises the lifeworld. Bloom (2012) illustrated, with an extreme example, a society where the lifeworld is totally colonized and society is reproduced as a system. Habermas also argues that systems and the lifeworld are radically uncoupled. The uncoupling of the system from the lifeworld means that the organizational structure of the lifeworld, that is, communicatively achieved

norms and social networks, have no effect on the systems that can interfere with the lifeworld (Amelia, 2013).

Cooperative actions, according to Habermas (1984 &1987), should be carried out via deliberation and argument among members. When decisions are being made from the perspective of the lifeworld of stakeholders such as academics, students and industrialists, then such decisions should be appropriate to the present, as well as to future contexts. According to University Act, 1978 and amended 1995, faculty boards, the Senate, and other statutory bodies are formulated in universities as forums for discussion and argument. Universities have been structured to make decisions from the bottom to the top such as Faculty Boards, Senates, Councils, Standing Committees, and the Commission at the UGC. Consequently, universities should function through deliberation and argument among its members.

The theory of communicative action has been used in prior studies to explain different organizational phenomena such as the operation of accounting systems in practice (Laughlin, 1987), to

developing marketing techniques (Toledo, 1986), in business management (Herda and Messerschmitt, 1991), in professional communication, international relations and comparative policy analysis, information technology, planning (Forester, 1989), and certification and education of professional accountants (Power and Laughlin, 1996). The analyses presented in these studies show the appropriateness of the theory of communicative action to capture the dynamics of organizational and management practices. The richness of the theory has been attributed to the importance accorded to language in organizational decision making processes (Laughlin, 1987).

Although in advancing his theory, Habermas focuses mainly on advanced industrialized societies in Europe or North America, the theory has been utilized not only in developed countries such as the USA (Boltan, 2005, Deflem, 2008, Flynn, 2007, Jansonc, 1999, Bamber, 2007; Plot, 2009; and Wakefield et al, 2011) and the UK (Hook, 2008), Sweden (Goldkuhl, 2001), Norway (Watsonic, 2013), Australia (Ryan, 2009; Pearce et al, 2009), Finland (Heikienea & Huttunen, 2011) and Switzerland (Kernstock & Brexendorf, 2009), but also in non-European, non-industrial, developing countries such as South Africa (Fourie, 2009), Indonesia (Pujiningsih et al, 2014), India (Puri & Sahay, 2003) and Sri Lanka (Gunatunge and Karunayake, 2002) in different disciplines such as medicine, political science, language, and accounting. Furthermore, the utilization of the theory in non-European and non-industrial countries has been justified by many researchers (Puri & Sahay, 2003; Gunatunge & Karunanayake, 2002). Merely, because the theory has been used in other countries, it also makes an attempt to apply it to a Sri Lankan case study. The theory of communicative action explains how people reach common understandings and coordinated action through reasoned argument, consensus and cooperation, in order to pursue their goals (Habermas, 1984 and 1987). The theory is concerned with how actors in a social interaction rely on their language abilities to develop a shared understanding of each other's culture and knowledge, which subsequently promotes coordination and socialization (Laughlin, 1987). Accordingly, communication can be considered a coordination device. For that reason, Gunatunge and Karunayake (2002) equate acts of communication with act of coordination. Accordingly, communicative action theory can be considered as a potentially useful theory for this study which explores coordination and cooperation among stakeholders in the faculties of management at State universities in Sri Lanka.

Communicative action theory becomes potentially useful for this study not only due to the similarity between issues with which the present study is concerned with and the issues the theory explains, but also because of the context in which these issues are explored. Firstly, the higher education system or the university or a management faculty is a social system that has been subject to environmental disturbances by changes brought upon it by the political, economic and social systems using the mechanisms of 'bureaucratisation' and 'monetarisation' (Ryan, 2009). Secondly, the university is, in essence, a place of reflection, critique and communication, in short, "an enchanted space for open communication where the arts of communication can be learned, exercised and developed" (Kemmis, 1998, p. 6). The same notions of "reciprocity, trust, shared knowledge and reasoned arguments" underlie both Habermasian notions of communicative action (Burrell, 1993, p. 8) and ideal university dynamics.

The theory of communicative action and its associated concepts, thus provide an insight into how 'bureaucratisation' and 'monetarisation' take place in social systems and how communication is exercised in modern society, particularly in the university context; and how it is projected on the issue of the lack of coordination and cooperation among its stakeholders.

Habermas' theory of communicative action is a social critical theory (Bolton, 2005 & Rasmussen, 2007). A critical theory is an application of principles made in order to judge the purpose of positive change. According to TCA, everyone has an equal opportunity to take part in decision-making and to critique the status quo of the political and administrative phenomena. TCA explains how two or more individuals interact and coordinate their actions based on mutual deliberation, argumentation and agreed interpretation of the situation. However, according to Habermas, communication has often been distorted by unequal opportunities to initiate and participate in it within the modern capitalist society. Such conditions have been criticized by Habermas, who argues for an "ideal speech" situation - a situation in which genuine consensus is arrived at between parties in communication and is recognized as a consensus without the operation of power (or with symmetrical power relations). In other words, all participants are capable of reaching mutual understanding and coordination of action only when they have equal opportunities to communicate among themselves, and then the whole communicative exercise becomes transparent. The main points of the theory are rationality, argument and understanding (Richard, 2003). Referring to Michael and Moor (2003), the features of TCA are centred on the strength, well-grounded arguments provided in an open forum, rather than on authority, tradition, power or

prejudice. According to Habermas (1984 & 1987) communicative action is an organized form of social relations through dialogue, for the development of understanding and coordination among individuals.

Habermas argues that when people enjoy equal opportunities to communicate among themselves, the whole communicative exercise becomes transparent. Furthermore, he states that in early societies, equal opportunities for communication, coordination, and cooperation existed to a great extent and, such a society is called a lifeworld. However, later in modern society, equal opportunities to communicate amongst peoples and the transparency of that process began to decrease and was gradually lost when society moved into what he calls 'systems'. This process of the evolution of society can be graphically shown as follows.
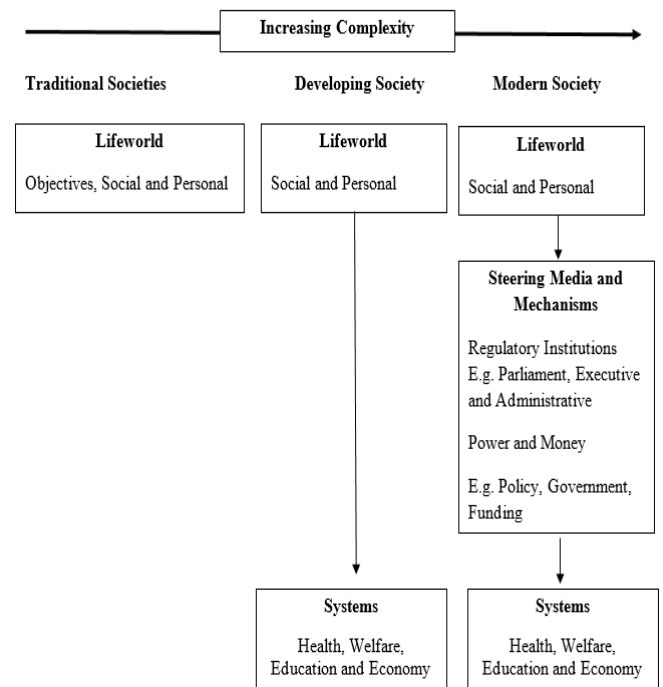

Figure 1 Hebermas' Conception of Social Development

Source: Adopted from Laughlin, 1987, 488 cited in Ryan, 2009, 89

II. METHODOLOGY

A single embedded case study strategy, together with qualitative methodology, was adopted while taking a critical constructivist research philosophy. Twenty nine in-depth interviews, three focus group discussions and documentary reviews were used as data collection methods. Students, academics, academic administrators, non-academic administrators, unemployed graduates, alumni, industrialists, representatives from UGC and MoHE were interviewed from March 2014 to February 2015. The researcher has undertaken a qualitative approach which leans towards constructionists in analysing the data as a critical interpretive framework. The study met its own philosophical, theoretical and logic design. As a triangulation method, the interview, focus group discussions and documentary evidence were analysed.

As mentioned above, Habermas's theory consists of two concepts, the lifeworld and the system (Habermas, 1984). Historically, the term "lifeworld" has signified the pattern of societal action. According to the communicative action theory, the cultural, personal, and social life of the individual converges into his/her lifeworld. The concept of the 'lifeworld' ('slebenswelt' in German) comes from phenomenology, particularly from the work of Husserl and Schutz. Habermas gave it his own specific meaning. Habermas brings a narrower meaning to lifeworld than Husserl and Schutz. The system is defined as a process which incorporates different aspects such as the language system and the behavioural system. The system is therefore embedded in the lifeworld, and in Habermas' words, colonises the lifeworld.

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According to Habermas (1984 &1987), cooperative actions should be carried out via deliberation and argument among members. When decisions are being made from the perspective of the lifeworld of stakeholders such as academics, students and industrialists, then such decisions should be appropriate to the present as well as to future contexts. Faculty boards, the Senate, and other statutory bodies are formulated in universities (university Act, 1978 and amended 1995) as forums for discussion and argument. Universities have been structured to make decisions from the bottom to the top such as Faculty boards, Senates, Councils, Standing committees, and the Commission at the UGC. Consequently, universities should function through deliberation and argument among its members.

III. DISCUSSION AND FINDING

Historically, the term "lifeworld" has signified the pattern of societal action. According to the communicative action theory, the cultural, personal, and social life of the individual converges into his/her lifeworld. The concept of the 'lifeworld' ('slebenswelt' in German) comes from phenomenology, particularly from the work of Husserl and Schutz. Habermas gave it his own specific meaning. Habermas brings a narrower meaning to lifeworld than Husserl and Schutz. The system is defined as a process which

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However, the present phenomenon seems to contravene this. For instance, in the preliminary interview, one academic explained that his lifeworld helped him to propose a demo company practiced in other Universities at his Faculty and finally said "...But still we are lacking in some areas… can't practice what we learned or experienced" (UKSL 3).

This shows that there still prevails a bureaucratic system in Management Faculties, in spite of their appearing to be autonomous bodies in the Universities Act. The view of Goonesekera (2013) also seems to be that pressure is being exercised on academics through the Vice-chancellors, Deans and Heads of Departments to make decisions that are favourable to the decision makers and implement them.

The university contains all the features of a large bureaucratic organisation. As Warnapala (2007) noted, "The University is administered as a Government department as part of the colonial model" and has not changed much to date. Further, use of resources including the finances of each University is subject to directions from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the University Grants Commission (UGC). In addition to the Universities Act, Financial Regulations (FR) and Administrative Regulations (AR) of the Government are also applied to Universities, as they apply to other government institutes. This clearly shows that the university functions as a bureaucratic system. The Faculty of Management is a sub system within the University, and the academic departments coming under the faculties are also sub sub-systems within the faculty. Therefore, both faculties and departments are subject to the Universities Act, FR and AR of the Government.

Similarly, control exercised by higher authorities is witnessed in other areas in higher education as well, including construction projects, new degree programmes etc. This seems to indicate that experienced individual academics cannot contribute much to decision making through their own experiences and their own perceptions; conversely the academic's lifeworld in Management Faculties may be shaped and directed by the systems (Wimalasuriaya, 2013 and

Senanayake, 2013). Many academics are very interested in initiating, undertaking and getting involved in various activities for the betterment of the faculty, especially after receiving further training (Short term, Masters, or PhDs), but the present bureaucratic system of higher education seems to neither permit nor motivate them to career development. According to the views of students and staff, communication is lacking in the class room itself, and students may not be motivated to share their feelings, teaching and learning activities. Therefore, the present curriculum and the learning environment needs to be changed to a student-centred learning environment. According to Kolitch and Dean (1999) in the "engaged critical model of teaching", it seems that teaching and learning happens more in terms of a dialogue. Students, each with a unique life experience, and the teacher, also with a unique life experience, engage in a mutual and creative dialogue which establishes the base for arguments and brings forth challenges. The same idea is clearly expressed by the communicative action theory. But still there is doubt among the researchers. They still seem to believe that in Management Faculties, the teaching and learning focuses only on the delivery mode. In addition, the bureaucratic mind sets of teachers, the existing lecture hall facilities and the teaching aids may also be limited to the traditional or transmission model of teaching. It seems that the present university system also does not allow peer academics to share experiences via dialogue and mutual discussion.

The present promotion system among academics also encourages them to work within an imposed system. If they do not conform they may be answerable to the authorities and explanations called for, and audit queries. The academic administrators most often avoid taking decisions which are risky and uncertain. They are compelled to take decisions which are certain to work in the prevailing conditions so that they could safeguard themselves and their positions.

Therefore, it is ultimately the lifeworld, in academic societies, that has to be responsible for keeping the 'system-world' honest. A research project done by Ryan (2009) which was conducted in Australia using communicative action theory, also indicated that the lifeworld creates the system, but this fact is contradicted in the present phenomenon in Management Faculties. Considering the above mentioned factors, the second proposition is stated as,

According to the perception of academics and academic administrators, including UGC representatives and World Bank representatives, the administrative procedures of management faculties are highly bureaucratic where all activities of academic programmes and decisions of administrators are bound by the rules, regulations and by-laws, which are executed by the University Act and related circulars. This scenario is treated by the research participants as a system perceived by them as a controlling mechanism. Research participants have used different terminologies such as "bottle neck", "bureaucracy", "conventional thinking", "hierarchical tools", "protocol", "traditional thinking" "red tape", "while elephant" and "formal approach" to label this system. Most academics believe that the present university system does not help them to implement what they have learned or gathered from experiences in their personal, cultural and social lives. Different stakeholders illustrate the experiences faced by them during their academic and administrative careers with different examples. At the same time, the existing system is seen by them to be outdated and does not permit them to shape graduates'

knowledge, skills and attitudes due to the absence of flexibility in the present rules, regulations and by-laws. This is thus articulated by interviewees;

 "We take the university as a system. I have seen the system overrunning. Sometimes these are out dated practices. Even if I was a part of the system, I would find it difficult to change…. So sometimes. We just look at the Business Management perspective when there are other non-Business Management perspectives as well….. We need to have flexible rules and regulations to suit our purposes." (AC04).

"It's a problem with the prevailing administrative set up. .., I think it's because of the procedures, rules and regulations- these are highly bounded." (AD05).

"Most of the people don't like to accept this kind of new format because they are always working for the traditional set up, especially the Senate. Professors come from the Arts faculty and Science faculty and they can't understand what our proposals are. They are always questioning us, this is definitely a barrier."(AD03)

In fact, the university functions as a system where all individuals work within the system. According to the hierarchy of the university, the administrators and academic administrators have authority and power. These academic administrators and administrators work closely with the system to implement the rules and regulations to suit themselves. Most of the decisions are implemented by them without any resistance or critique within the institutional setup. However, this is not to say that there are no grievances. Academics and students do have grievances which are not expressed or addressed properly. One reason for the lack of resistance to the system is that the attitude of people pertaining to the higher authority is one of respect. In most cases, senior faculty members or administrative staff in the decision making body, are or have been, teachers of junior academics and the latter are not ready to argue with them. Many senior academics also do not accept a culture of discussion and critique, and most juniors are also not in a position to question issues or decisions. Another reason is that most Heads of Department or fellow academics expect to work closely with top administrative officers. If they confront them, they may lose their future benefits, either monetary or non-monetary. The majority of the academic community work with their personal career goal in mind as they do not like to damage their careers. They are highly dependent on the recommendation of the administrative officers, not only for obtaining their rights such as leave of absence and promotions, but also to obtain their privileges such as obtaining sabbatical leave and air fares. Academics are not showing their resistance openly but they act indirectly as stated below;

"They may not comment. So passive resistance may be there. So that won't basically obstruct these proceedings. Or else, if they see that someone has made a kind of adverse comment, there might be someone else adding something into it. Just neutralize and defeat. That can happen." (AD04).

Most of the voluntary posts, including Heads of Departments, are nominated from academics. Holding high posts leads to points for professorship. Those posts also give extra income and training for personal development. Therefore, academics and students do not air their resistance even though they have issues or grievances. Similarly, students and members of the alumni are mostly undergraduates or postgraduate students of

the Faculty and therefore, they also live in the same organisational culture. Thus, except for a few, most industrialists who graduated from the same university do not express their own resistance. Even though they showed their opposition in various forums (FGD and Interviews) their voices are not recognized properly.

"There is no resistance and we started it. Thereafter, there should be university back up, then we went to the previous Vice-chancellor and he was also very keen. Everybody is very keen, they see a potential, they are very interested, but nothing gets done, that's the problem. There are no such regulations. That is the main problem to proceed with this company. Not having such provisions in the university system to establish a company. When we try to do something there is resistance. They don't accept. At the departmental level, I don't have any problem, whatever suggestion they warmly welcome and correct me if there is anything wrong. We can express any idea and any view in the department. When it comes to the faculty level, sometimes the faculty encounters resistance. (AC07)".

Sri Lankan culture is hierarchical. Since people do not express their own feelings spontaneously, they have alternative ways of communicating, particularly with senior people. Most academics (graduates) who graduate from the same university or neighboring universities, are well known to each other and they are loathe to criticize or point out any mistakes or unethical decisions made by each other, in order to maintain the relationship. For example, most members of the Council, Senate or Faculty Board or even trade unions, do not express their own opinions, preferring to talk outside of the formal meeting, either after the meeting or in other places. Similar

behaviour can be observed among students and alumni. For example, most of the lecturers invite questions from students during the lecture hours or at the end of the lecture in the "classroom". In most cases, students do not ask any questions in the classroom, but at the end of the class students queue up in front of the staff room. Open communication becomes difficult in this culture. Sri Lankan culture is different from the culture in which Habermas derived his TCA. Sri Lanka is a diffident society. Academics and students like to talk, but cultural barriers do not allow them to express their own opinions freely. In this environment, most academics and students lose their opportunity to engage in dialogue and are reserved or expect another "secret place" rather than an "ideal place" for open and constructive dialogue. Habermas believes that if the "ideal speech situation" is allowed, then this would lead to effective coordination and cooperation, but in the higher educational sectors in Sri Lanka that assumption does not hold. There is another important aspect of communication practices in universities in Sri Lanka. Most of the actors avoid free speech and explore their opinions in various ways, for example, by the use of petitions. Again, this is an informal form of communication, but this exploration of opinion is not formally accepted. People also communicate their opinions via anonymous letters or threatening telephone calls. Another way of exchanging ideas is via social media. Here issues are communicated to friends rather than directly to the responding officers. These are some of the specific ways of communicative action that take place in universities in the Sri Lankan context (FGD).

Is it a question of the present university system not allowing academics "to work freely"?, Is it not also the case that there is an institutional culture of compliance and conformity to which both

administrators and academics subscribe? The present university system is bounded by rigid rules and regulations, which do not allow academics to work freely or academic freedom and institutional autonomy is lost, since their own thinking is not inbuilt into the development of the university. The main idea of a university is that of autonomy, that from government control and interferences in academic matters and day to day administration (Uyangoda, J, (2015). At the same time, a few academic administrators manipulate the rules and regulations to achieve their own goals by using their power. Most academics do not like to create confrontations, but this does not mean they support all activities of the administration, as an academic clearly stated below;

"If they are dissatisfied with me definitely they will not give their cooperation. Sometime they are silent…..When the people keep silent, naturally they can't contribute. So they can't do the team work. For example, during the decision making time with different people say at the faculty board. It directly affects the development of the department. If they don't have team work and cooperation and coordination with the leader, then it is a barrier. That will directly affect the graduates output also" (AC10).

The same argument is put forward by a senior member of the UGC. According to his argument the present rules and regulations do not allow academics to work in the private sector. Similarly, industrialists are also not allowed to work at the University, which results in a lack of coordination and cooperation between academics and industrialists. Both parties understand the reality, but they do not work together due to barriers in the system. This scenario creates the question of, 'who should initiate the action?' Of course from

the university perspectives, the academic administrators or academic staff are knowledge workers and they are called "intellectuals" and therefore it seem that, they should begin discussions with the industrialist, but they are not given a chance to initiate dialogue even though some of them wish to do so. This is due to the barriers in the university system. This is articulated by research participants from the industrial side;

"Higher authority (academic leaders) should take initiatives to break the bureaucratic blocking and have a dialogue with industries at national levels. So far there is no formal communication between industries and universities" (IN04).

"They have not taken any initiatives to work with universities because they have other options to recruit employees. Universities are preparing graduates based on examinations, but they are recruited only 40% for their educational achievements and the rest for their skills and talents. Graduates are not practical oriented" (IN06).

The same argument is suggested by academics. They have provided evidence of having taken initiatives on several occasions, which have been rejected by the higher authorities. This is captured in the following comments from the academics:

"To speak honestly, I see our faculty is different from others in our university. Because, we actually, aggressively start some sort of initiative. We are a young faculty, our faculty level is really supportive, we are appreciated, encouraged, there is no politics. But when it comes out of the faculty level, to the university scenario, the faculty of graduate studies and university senate levels, we see a traditional code. And they come up with lots

of questions and sorts of issues, why are you doing this" (AC02).

"Of course we have done initiatives. We have student associations. That is well established and is named 'Future Marketers Association', so even we do a lot of industry based programs. We have journal publications, executive series. They are the resource people. They also come over here. And we are some authoritative final year subjects, even brand management and strategic management subjects, we have industry based simulation activities" (AC04).

"In Sri Lankan universities, we don't find any form of transformation at all, they are still traditional universities, in these countries it is very difficult to implement anything new or innovative in the university system, if it is worth to better the university. The other thing is, whatever we want to do, we need to get approval, because of the number of bodies. When we have a number of bodies, there will be a delay. Sometimes because of this delay, we are unable to get the benefits of the initiatives" (AC05).

The university is a place for innovation and creativity. A university should be innovative and creative in products for the world, but the above views show that it is very difficult to implement any innovative ideas. This view reveals that academics are willing to innovate, but due to barriers in the system they cannot do so, or in other words they are not ready to take a risk or face confrontation with others since they are doing their prime duty by teaching. At the same time, representing the university higher authority, the chairman of the Standing Committee at the UGC who represents the government of Sri Lanka described the present phenomenon in a similar manner. For example:

"So we are in the midst of heavily controlled rules and regulations. Also universities should allow academics to work in industry. And we must have rules and we must accommodate industry in our lectures." (GOV01).

The above statement clearly revealed the expectation of an academic administrator who is presently a member of the Commission/UGC, Chairman of the Standing Committee of Management Studies and Commerce of the UGC and the former Dean of one of the leading Management Faculties in Sri Lanka. Even though he is in the decision making body of the Government of Sri Lanka, he is not in a position to explore his own views due to the barriers in the system. A similar view is expressed by an employer as follows:

"Our university system is a traditional system.. we have to go through a lot of bureaucratic red tape, barriers, and challenges. I don't know whether the State universities are ready to face those challenges." (IN04).

The existing system in the university is a very old one, which was originated during the colonial period. Most of the rules and regulations of the system, which were put in place in a particular context, are no longer appropriate for the present scenario. One of the Heads of Departments and a Head of a Professional Institute claimed that most of the systems in the university are outdated:

"They (academics) think in a traditional way." (AD05).
"The system worked 30 years ago. You have to break it up." (IN02).

In the prevailing economic era where there is an explosion in the knowledge of economics, universities are expected to produce knowledgeable graduates who are needed to fulfill

the expectations of industries. But, these creative ideas coming from young academics are controlled by a few conventional senior academics, who use the rules and regulations of the traditional university system to stifle creativity. Consequently, the university is not ready to face its external challenges particularly from industry. There is no innovation and creation as expected, and this is revealed by the quotations of the research participants given below:

"The universities are not providing that creativity, the university does not have that." (IN05)
"The purpose cannot be achieved because they are going behind exams." (AC 07)

Another aspect is that academics have lost their autonomy. There could be a degree of autonomy, but academics do not use this autonomy since they do not openly discuss issues, and they are influenced by self-imposed discipline and fear. They behave according to an institutional arrangement or cultural arrangement. When the academics and students discuss the present university system they do not openly express their own views, particularly the junior academics who are the majority in the academic pools. They try to safeguard the image of the institutions, either due to fear of the top management or due to reluctance to upset the status quo. Students, particularly do not openly express their own opinions because they are not aware of their rights, especially the basic awareness of the students' representation at the Faculty Board. Members of the Alumni Association also do not want to upset the administration because academic staff are in key positions in the Alumni Association.

Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are key features of the university (Readings, 1999 & Rasmussen, 2007). The original concept of the university has provided space for academic freedom which was based on innovation and creativity. Universities are a source for most inventions. This scenario is only possible when an academic works freely and studies issues in society, something which has resulted in many new inventions in leading universities in Western and Eastern countries. But according to the views of academics, academic administrators and students in Sri Lankan Management Faculties, they have not been given the freedom to express their feelings or act according to their wishes or to oppose decisions that are not appropriate. For example;

"Why do some people dominate because of others' weaknesses? Rather, their weakness. If you you're your stamina what you works, you are accountable or responsible academia is a responsible characters. That's why we are giving enough freedom for this. It is not an academic freedom. It is an academic right. We have been given freedom to think, analysis and evaluate. Because our job is boundary less …If you permit dominate others, so domination is some people make others to dominate them. It is people practices, It is their weakness" (AC04).

"Dean sometimes we have arguments, with the Vice Chancellor. The freedom is there no problem. So we have a conducive environment in that, especially in faculty level. In case of students, we have only two representatives yes. Once we start first we will take the students' matters. Then we ask them to talk or raise the issues. They have been given the opportunity to talk, the freedom to talk. There are no barriers for them, they are coming to the faculty regularly" (AD05).

This quotation expresses the fact that students are given the freedom to talk and their matters are taken up at the initial stage of the Faculty Board

meetings. This is good, but in actuality what is happening is that even though students are full members of the Faculty Board (University Act,1978), their matters are taken up at the beginning, and they do not express their own opinions due to cultural barriers and leave the meetings without participating in the whole decision making process (AD 05). This shows that they are not given an option to participate in the discussion and they do not have a chance to learn what is actually going on. They are the future academics in the university setup. The researcher believes that students are not provided the freedom to participate in mutual discussions with university academics and administrators. These practices are being continued as a tradition.

Academic freedom is an important feature of a university, but Sri Lankan academics and administrators have their own concept of "freedom". Let's look at the following extracts:

"In our department, we have the freedom to talk …, but there are, sometimes, no? At the end, we are coming for the final agreement. There are anybody directly, might be personally change the debate, I like somebody is telling to me something if I am doing wrong it is practicing" (AC08).

"We don't have such freedoms now. Some time we can discuss through the lecturer (students)."

The academic administrator is trying to show that his own administration period is better than the previous period. Most academics and academic administrators indirectly explain that the previous period (during the last dean's period). Moreover, the system not only controls academic behavior, but also influences administrative affairs, as is indicated by another interviewee:

"A bad election system is bounded by university acts and creates internal politics …they are

counting votes for the next term not anything else" (AC05).

The analysis presented in the previous chapter also sheds light on the deficiency of the system where a cadre allocation is based on the students' ratio, which does not fulfill the needs of the faculty. Most academics do not think seriously about the importance of linkages with industry due to the lack of staff and the heavy workloads of the available staff which was evident by the following quote:

"Staff cannot be taken… because we have very limited cadre positions. Because they allocate the cadre based on the student ratio" (AD03).

Furthermore, other research participants representing the decision making body expressed the idea that the system blocks the decision making process in many ways. For example, when an academic wishes to implement his or her own experience in the Management Faculty in order to improve the quality of graduates, he/she has to wait to get approval from the Departmental Meeting, Faculty Board, Curriculum Evaluation Committee, Senate, Council, Standing Committee and the Commission from the UGC. Sometimes, it is necessary to get approval even from the Ministry of Higher Education. Due to the fact that these hierarchical levels of decision making bodies or layers are adopted in the system, the initiators are not aware about what happens in meetings and the consequences of the decisions, and also they do not have an opportunity to justify their reasons for the proposal which is illustrated in the quote below:

"Mainly another problem is this protocol because they know that this cannot be implemented" (AC07).

Furthermore, the discussion revealed that academics understand the need for changes in the

curriculum and evaluations to match the requirements of the labour market. But, the academic who follows a rigid system does not allow them to work freely or independently as stated in the next quotation:

"One of our departments wanted to introduce some sort of new degree programs and those are very different programs and they are innovative. And they had a problem because this can be rejected by the Senate because of those critical guys there" (AC02).

In addition, the research participant states that the person who is in the position also realized the need for the changes and their importance. But the system does not permit change as illustrated in the following narrative:

"They also agreed that it was very creative, but there have seen some problems in the execution, such as, lack of resources or something that was the problem, for sustainability of that. So the problem is that some people agree to do it, but the platform does not support it" (AC07).

Why do the research participants say that the present university system does not accommodate what the TCA describes as their lifeworld? This is because, they are not allowed to implement new ideas, they experience delays in process and procedures and they also cannot manage contingencies. Events of this nature make academics and other stakeholders frustrated, feel that they lack autonomy, and create disappointments and grievances which leads them to give up their jobs and eventually go abroad which ultimately leads to a brain drain. This is narrated as follows:

"When we try to do something there is resistance. They don't accept it" (AC07).

"Decided not to do any conferences hereafter" (AC02).

"When they proposed some degree program, no one agreed to that. They had to withdraw their proposals" (AD02).

In contrast, one of the academics says that the system has to be the present and that it is appropriate, but the academic should adapt to the system. This is illustrated below:

"We have individual responsibility. Learn the system, learn the outsiders' expectations and make ourselves flexible for the scenario. So we have to be prepared. Let's see financial rules we have one month before approval. I know that, so then I should start my work one month beforehand." (AC04).

He argues further for his justification:
"We have the system or prior approval procedure, by approval so we know that it takes times. So a one month or two months approval, because of knowing the rules and regulation system, some of the cases have not been that flexible. There are some cases, they are completely off the documents." (AC04).

According to the previous statement, the academic is trying to say that they are working according to the system because the system is perfect. Further, he says that the people should be prepared to work with the system. But, by the end of the statement he expresses the reality that "there are some cases, they are completely off the document". Meaning that proposals are passed by using influence. This statement clearly reveals that the "perfect system" is not functioning efficiently in order to achieve the goals of the organization.

However, the contradictory nature of the evidence of one research participant is that the system allows space for the communication of action, but

all previous evidence gathered from other research participants indicate that there is no space for communication, where the lifeworld of academics and industrialists are dominated and limited by the system.

Furthermore, the relationship between academics and other stakeholders, particularly industrialists, are weak. Industrialists also have similar views to the ones expressed by the research participants about university administrations. According to the view of industrialists, universities are not performing their roles due to systemic barriers. They believe that university academics have not retained the ownership of the product (graduates) and they teach their students merely as a job. Industries are willing to work with universities, but universities are not willing to liaise properly with industry. According to the views of academic leaders and administrators, industrialists are happy to have links with universities as a research participant describes:

"Industry people more or less they are coming and doing some activities, but those relationships are highly dependent on personal contacts and some are not accepting because some don't like to accept other people's opinions in a meeting and everything." (AD03).

"This is the lack of interest. They have a lack of appreciation of the issue of employability of graduates because the university doesn't take ownership of graduates." (IN03).

It can be seen, therefore, that the system is very neutral, its values are equally applicable to all situations. However, the system does not work in practice. The issue was explored through the lens of the theory of communicative action. The theory of communicative action states when people have equal opportunities to communicate, they prefer to communicate with each other and reach their goals through agreed mutual understanding. However, the theory argues that contemporary society, i.e. modern society, is characterized by system and bounded by a bureaucracy which uses powers and money as steering mechanisms to reach coordination and cooperation towards achieving its goals. As a result, people do not have equal opportunities to communicate in the present society, and thus the present society faces challenges in reaching goals through mutual understanding.

Drawing from CAT, four propositions were developed that explain the research issue. Thus it is proposed that the system overrunning the lifeworld, asymmetric power relations among stakeholders, instrumental action overrunning communicative action are likely to result in the weakening of the coordination and cooperation among stakeholders of Sri Lankan Management Faculties, and may minimize the employability of graduates.

According to the analysis of data collected from the case study cite, the study identifies academics, administrators, industrialists, Government staff and students as important stakeholders, where the coordination and cooperation among them are essential to ensure graduate employability. The coordination and cooperation are studied with the sub-themes derived from the TCA - forum for dialogue, level of trust between the main stakeholders, commitment towards achieving the common goals, and finally, recognition of mutual expectations of the parties. Put it differently, forum for dialogue, level of trust between the main stakeholders, commitment towards achieving the common goals, and finally, recognition of mutual expectations of the parties are taken as sub-themes to study the levels of

coordination and cooperation among stakeholders. The analysis shows that there is a lack of coordination and cooperation between the academics and the other stakeholders. In other words, there exists less room for forum for dialogue within the faculty and the university systems, trust between the main stakeholders and commitment towards achieving the common goals are weak, and finally, the recognition of mutual expectations of the parties are poor. Thus coordination and cooperation among stakeholders are weak.

Further, it shows, as it is theorised in the TCA, the pattern of implementing bureaucratic systems in universities has negatively influenced coordination and cooperation among the stakeholders due to lack of mutual understanding. Furthermore, coordination and cooperation has become worse because of asymmetrical power. Accordingly, qualitative findings revealed that neither the bureaucratic system nor mutual understanding (i.e. through communicative action) provides a conducive platform to realise coordination and cooperation in this particular Management Faculty, thus it has failed to reach the goal of graduate employability. Power is a steering medium and mechanism in the bureaucratic system which assumes control of all activities of individuals of the universities. The bureaucratic system along with dominant academic administrators/academics who gain power through hierarchical organization, hierarchical society and or personal achievement, does not permit people to engage in open dialogue, people lose their mutual trust, which leads to less commitment towards achieving the common goals.

IV. FINDING AND IMPLICATION

The Theory of Communicative Action is a general theory of society which considers social act, which Habermas redefines as a communicative act, as a unit of analysis (Habermas, 1984 & 1987).The CAT tries to explore a form of social relations oriented towards the development of mutual understanding through dialogue (Habermas 1986a, 1987). Even though his aim is to develop a general theory of society, his focus is on advanced industrial, capitalist society. Culture, economic and political background of such societies is different from that of Sri Lanka which is a developing, neo-liberalized economy with elements of traditional society (Nanayankara, 1985). In Sri Lankan culture, people respect family members, elders or seniors. Germany where Habermas engages more of his scholarly life and many other advanced-industrial societies are known as rational societies with less power distance (Ryan, Neumann, and Guthrie, 2008), whereas Sri Lanka is a hierarchical society with the prevalence of power and/or status differences among different layers (Nanayankara, 1985).

This study shows that the CAT, in spite of its main focus on advanced industrial, capitalist society, has the power of explaining how people act and respond even in a developing, neo-liberalized economy with elements of traditional society, of course with some reservations. More specifically, the study shows that the CAT fails to appreciate or blind to the implications of asymmetric of power, originated from social hierarchy based on power/status differences, in communicative act leading to mutual understanding.

According to the CAT, colonization of life-world by system is a reason or the only reason for the hindrance of coordination and cooperation

through mutual understanding. However, the present study indicates that the colonization of life-world is not the only reason for the failure of reaching coordination and cooperation through mutual understanding. In addition, asymmetric power originated from power/status differences in society is also likely to hinder coordination and cooperation through mutual understanding. Similarly, all participants should be given equal opportunities to express their own experiences and learning in order to contribute to achieving the goals of the organisation. For this purpose, there should be a free space for discussions and arguments. Such constructive arguments foster a free speech situation where mutual understanding is reached among the participants, and coordination and cooperation among the participants is created, where they enjoy equal opportunities to communicate their desires (Habermas, 1984). According to the interviewees' responses, they have not been given a time and space to explore their own wishes and put forward their arguments properly, due to the very rigid system and cultural limitations. This situation clearly reveals that the lifeworld of the stakeholders is overrun by the bureaucratic system of universities in Sri Lanka.

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