

Perceptions of Organizational Politics Among Public Sector University Faculty

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Abstract

The fact that politics exist in Pakistani organizations is true for the education sector too. This research distinguished whether maintaining and moving to higher positions in a brief time frame in the hierarchy of a higher education institution, is through belongingness or is it through labor and capability. This study investigated the existence of politics among the teachers of public sector higher education institutions and is structured around the Perceptions of Organizational Politics (PoPs) developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). The perceptions of organizational politics were measured by three variables, general political behavior, going along to get ahead, and pay and promotion policy. Data were collected in two phases: the first phase included the collection of quantitative data from 367 university faculty which was analyzed using SPSSv-22.0. and in the second phase, 15 university Deans/HoDs were interviewed for triangulation. The results of the research established that politics exists at the university level where teachers and professors act the same way as workers in any other organization. The research likewise brought to the fore a solid relationship between workers' apparent contentment with regards to paying and advancement and organizations' compensation and advancement guidelines.

Keywords: higher education, organizational politics, pay and promotion, perceptions of organizational politics.

Introduction

Organizational politics takes the form of perceived organizational politics when it is looked at from the employees' point of view because it is usually considered undesirable and has been termed as something negative in the workplace. Considering the insufficiency of resources and the perception that individuals are selfish in nature, it becomes difficult to escape from the effects of politics at the workplace. Kanter (1979) considered 'group force' and 'power and politics' as universal and she indicated that the terms were negative. Politics and power have critical impacts not just on the members of the team but also on the whole institution.

The subjective nature of the perceptions of organizational politics (PoPs) is due to the fact that it is not only invisible but it also varies across individuals (Ferris et al., 1989). It is this subjective nature that influences the decision of whether an act is political or not, depending on the perceptions and experiences of an individual. Block (1988) made a beautiful statement when he stated that if he told someone to be very political, that someone would take it either as a compliment or as an insult. Henceforth, individuals see politics according to their experiences or observations, which are basically molded by the sort of encounters they have had at their particular place of work (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). In the event that they have been harmfully influenced by politics, they would think of it as evil and those whose positions progressed through politics would think about it in a positive manner. The outcomes of various investigations on the subject of politics show that politics, unfortunately, affects institutional settings. Albeit a limited quantity of politics is essential for the effective and smooth working of the group, overabundance of it is damaging for the whole group or team (Chang et al., 2009). Thus organizational politics can be beneficial as well as damaging for an organization (Maslyn et al., 2017).

One cannot help but agree with the fact that politics is present in the Pakistani context, including in higher education institutes (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Teachers have been generally seen advancing to a higher rank in their organizations predominantly due to their involvement in some sort of political conduct. One of the significant maneuvers to last in an association is to be basically part of an influential group. On numerous occasions, an employee has even been driven away from the work since he/she declines to be a party to any political show. The researcher himself has been an onlooker of politics being exercised at different

educational institutions. Thus the main reason behind the research is to look at PoPs among the teachers of government sector higher education institutes.

The purpose of this research was to perceive PoPs among employees of the public sector higher education institutions in Pakistan. This research has recognized whether sustainability and moving up among the ranks in higher education institutes in a short span is due to some belongingness or is it purely due to one's efforts and capability. Since it was a mixed method study the following research questions and hypotheses emerged:

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the idea of going along with a political group affect excelling in a university?
2. How far does a university follow its policies regarding pay and promotion?

Hypotheses

1. There is an association between the more you go along with a political group, the better you go ahead in the university.
2. There is a significant relationship between faculty's perceived pay and promotion policies and the stated pay and promotion policies in public sector universities.

Literature Review

This study is structured around the three areas of the Perceptions of Organizational Politics (PoPs) generated by Kacmar and Ferris (1991): these include (a) general political behavior, (b) going along to get ahead, and (c) pay and promotion policies. The theoretical framework of the study that has been developed shows that the three dimensions of the Perceptions of Organizational Politics (PoPs) will be looked at among the faculty of the public sector universities.

Organizational politics has caught the enthusiasm of researchers for a long while. Literature has offered numerous meanings for this notion (Drory & Romm, 1990). One of the most basic explications of workplace politics that is available in the texts is by Mintzberg (1983). According to him workplace politics in all

forms is illegitimate and is something that no authority would approve of. Instances of political conduct comprise circumventing the hierarchy of leadership to get an endorsement, adhering to inappropriate procedures to get superior apparatus, and shadowing and chasing high-level officers in order to make way for one's promotion (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001).

Perceptions of Organizational Politics

The examination of the available definitions from the past literature brought to the fore the existence of numerous commonalities (Ferris et al., 1993). One of the facts is the use of one's social influence which is attributed to political activities. Another fact is the notion that politics is a means to further or protect one's self-interest (Czada, 2019). Last but not least is the notion that in politics at least two parties should be there with the ability to have an opposing interest. A combination of all these aforementioned perspectives in a single definition permits us to see organizational politics as a means of social effect targeted at those who can deliver rewards that would assist in furthering the self-interest of the one who exercises it (Cropanzano et al., 1995).

General Political Behavior

Ferris et al., (1989) proposed the idea of PoPs as a decent yardstick for the measurement of workplace Politics. Also, according to Ferris and Kacmar (1992), an employee would view equality, valuableness, and decency at a lower level when the perceptions of politics are higher in the workplace. Sense of justice and politics, despite being related to each other, are differentiated by the researchers.

People usually view work fulfillment as a worker's approach to his work and the work-related fulfillment. Spector (1997) characterizes work fulfillment essentially as how much individuals like their occupations. Keller and Dansereau (1995) highlight that the perception regarding the control is about the level a worker feels to have mastery over the job unit and his terms with his seniors. The sense of empowerment would make the workers feel their workplace is free as compared to putting restrictions on the ability of the workers in such a way that the outcomes will be impacted by their actions. According to Ferris et al. (1998) understanding refers to the level of grasp as to why certain things occur in the way they occur at the workplace. Recent studies have identified different variables that provide fuel to

political acts (Jacobs & Mettler 2018). A few of these variables are singular attributes taken from the unique personality traits of an employee hired by the institution. Researchers have identified some traits from a combination of personality, wants, and various variables that are connected to political behavior. Keeping in view the traits, experts have identified employees with an internal locus of control along with a sense of being hungry for power as most likely to show political behavior at the workplace. Employees with high self-monitors will show more inclination toward political behavior due to the fact that they are more sociable and expressive as compared to the employees with low self-monitors. Internal locus of control gives a person the ability to control the conditions around them which enable them to take control of the situation for their own personal benefit (Robbins, 2005). Hence employees, who are termed as internals, are more familiar with political games than externals. The locus of control is made of two variables: internal and external. Internals have the confidence of dealing with the workplace environment. Such employees are termed as controllers of the environment because they are strong, internally motivated, and instinctive (Spector et al., 2001). Dunk and Nouri (1998) opined that externals have a weakness of seeing the outcomes of external forces rather than their own, which passively makes them related to performance. On the other hand, the intern has this belief of controlling the environment. They feel that politics around them will have no effect on their job-related outcomes because of their trust in their abilities. According to Hyatt and Prawitt (2001), their assessment of the workplace is attributed to the locus of control.

Ferris et al. (1989) suggested three negative results of politics at the workplace: anxiety at the workplace, lower work fulfillment, and the desire to quit the job. An understanding of this connection is that decisions, for example, asset distribution decisions, that are directed by political contemplations are normally seen as biased. If the workers feel that the decisions are biased they would feel unhappy (Strömbäck et al., 2017). Additionally, working in politically charged conditions will put them under stress which will add to their dissatisfaction (Yü-sheng, 2020). Researchers have been able to pinpoint the critical negative connection between PoPs and employee work related fulfillment (Randall et al., 1999). Eleven studies have been cited by Kacmar and Baron (1999) that showed an association between organizational politics and employee work fulfillment. Drory (1993) identified that politics at the workplace are negatively connected with job fulfillment and one's commitment to the organization. He further explored that workplace politics could

harm the lower-level employees, while the higher-level employees have no such impact. Vigoda (2000) found an adverse relationship between workplace politics and approaches at work, work fulfillment, and commitment to the institution. As per Mowday et al. (1997), an employee's attitude at the work is decided by the main factor of organizational politics. The workplace environment and work fulfillment are highly influenced by the attitude of the employees at the workplace (Paul et al., 2020).

Sowmya and Panchanatham (2012) endeavored to learn about the connection between organizational politics and the turnover intention of teachers in academic associations in Chennai, India. This examination explored the connection between turnover intention and workplace politics. Besides, they examined the impact of gender on the intention of turnover among the teachers in the academic organizations. Around 272 workers from engineering institutes in Chennai contributed in this study. The results of the exploration recognized the utility of investigating workplace politics in the context of turnover intention.

Go Along to Get Ahead

Literature has continually associated conflict with workplace politics (Frost, 1987; Gandz & Murray, 1980; Mintzberg, 1985). The genuine clarification behind this association is that political demeanor is egotistical, and along these lines, it can sabotage the egocentricities of others. Conflict ensues when someone responds to a risk (Porter et al. 1981). It infers that if an individual is acting in a particular way to advance his own special plan, then that individual is acting politically (Frost, 1987). A person who is not causing trouble is not viewed as a possible danger by the people who are acting politically. This particular individual is greeted by the political cluster and is compensated for not interfering in the issues of the politically motivated gathering. In this manner, not taking any action or by going on can be a wise method to advance one's own target and needs while working in a political stimulating setting (Alvesson, 2020).

Pay and Promotion Policies

Kacmar and Carlson (1997) stated that disregarding the way that the managers will not do it deliberately, it's the way the HR strategies and methods are developed and executed that it compensates the individual having political

demeanor and rebuke the people who don't engage in power moves. Such a perspective of the organization will bring about a custom where political deeds will be seen as something ordinary in an organization. Zaidi (2012) led an investigation to highlight the impact of workplace politics on the satisfaction level of employees' work fulfillment in Lahore, Pakistan. Their research featured the impact of working environment politics on the work satisfaction level of the people associated with and organization. A specimen of 250 workers working in the health sector was utilized for the investigation. The examination featured the converse relationship between PoPs and workplace satisfaction. It simply exhibits that when the discernment about politics is on a more raised level, the work fulfillment level would be low and the other way around.

Methodology

This research followed a mixed method of research with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research seeks answers to research questions in a descriptive manner through interviews or observation of those closest to the phenomenon (Davison, 2013). The interviews were the qualitative portion of the research and the survey provided the quantitative portion of the research. A phenomenological study utilizes mixed methods, qualitative, and quantitative methods in conjunction with one another. Creswell (2007) noted, "a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their shared experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). A mixed method joins both quantitative and qualitative strategies for gathering and examining data in a particular study. The idea of blending diverse strategies most likely began in 1959, when Campbell and Fiske utilized numerous techniques to consider the legitimacy of psychological traits. They urged others to utilize their multi-strategy framework to look at various ways to deal with data collection in a study. Mixed methods specialists use and regularly make clear assorted philosophical positions. Green (2007) stated that these positions frequently are alluded to as dialectal positions that connect post-positivist and social constructivist perspectives, realistic points of view, and transformative viewpoints.

Sample

Depending upon the research topic, the scholar chose a random sampling technique to select the participants for the quantitative part and a purposive sampling

technique for the qualitative part which means that the participants would be the very people who have experienced the phenomenon firsthand for the qualitative part. The selection criteria for identifying the target universities was the HEC ranking. The top three universities from each province and the federal capital were selected coming to a total of 15 universities for the present study. A total of 32 faculty members were selected from each university. Hence 480 university faculty members, which also included faculty teaching in the Degree Awarding Institutions (DAI) from all over Pakistan were contacted for this study. Nonetheless only 367 filled-in questionnaires were returned.

Instrument

The instrument used for this research was the 15-item Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (PoPs) developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) PoPs include three factors: (a) employees working in this association try to develop their own careers by bringing down others; (b) harmonizing oneself with influential groups is the best substitute in this association; and (c) in terms of increase in salary and career advancement decisions, policies become immaterial. Participants documented their views on each statement on a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), not sure (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The data thus collected were sorted out and analyzed by using SPSSv-22.0.

All 480 full-time faculty members teaching at the tertiary level were targeted from 15 public sector universities from across Pakistan. After screening, 367 questionnaires were found to be suitable for the study. The data thus collected were analyzed and based on the analysis an interview protocol was prepared in order to interview one purposefully selected Dean/HoD identified from each university for triangulation purposes. Hence, 15 Dean/HoDs were interviewed.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics Hypothesis 1

There is an association between the more you go along with a political group, the better you go ahead in the university.

Table 1*Go Along to Go Ahead * The Better you Go Ahead Cross-tabulation*

| | | The Better you Go Ahead | | | | | Total |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree | |
| Go Along to Go Ahead | Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| | Disagree | 0 | 0 | 8 | 34 | 8 | 50 |
| | Not Sure | 0 | 31 | 36 | 76 | 4 | 147 |
| | Agree | 3 | 8 | 25 | 103 | 13 | 152 |
| | Strongly Agree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 13 |
| Total | | 3 | 39 | 69 | 218 | 38 | 367 |

Table 1 shows that only 3 respondents disagreed with the statement, as compared with those who agreed with the statement the value of which is 103. In total 256 respondents agreed that the more you go along with a political group, the better you go ahead in the university while the number of respondents disagreeing with the statement is 42. Therefore, researchers can conclude not only that there is an association between the variables, but they can also describe the association. Researchers can conclude that the more you go along with a political group, the better you go ahead in the university.

Table 2*Chi-Square Tests*

| | Value | Df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|----------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 161.988a | 16 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 117.000 | 16 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 4.464 | 1 | .035 |
| N of Valid Cases | 367 | | |

Table 2 portrays the high two-tailed significant correlation between powerful political groups at the workplace and workers' subsistence at the work place with $n=367$ contributors against a two-tailed probability distribution with 95% confidence interval. For this situation there is a chi-square of 161.98, with 1 degree of freedom [$df = (2-1)(2-1) = 1$], which is significant at least at the 0.05 alpha level. Henceforth, the scholar acknowledges the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the more you go along with a political group, the better you go ahead in a higher education organization.

Descriptive Statistics Hypothesis 2

There is a significant relationship between faculty's perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion policies and the stated pay and promotion policies in public sector universities.

Table 3

*Employees perceived satisfaction regarding Pay and Promotion * the stated pay and promotion policies Cross-tabulation*

| | | The Stated Pay and Promotion Policies | | | | | Total |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree | |
| Employee Satisfaction Regarding pay and Promotion Policies | Strongly Disagree | 4 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 12 |
| | Disagree | 0 | 36 | 32 | 16 | 5 | 89 |
| | Not Sure | 0 | 25 | 63 | 23 | 0 | 111 |
| | Agree | 4 | 45 | 55 | 29 | 0 | 133 |
| | Strongly Agree | 7 | 0 | 12 | 3 | 0 | 22 |
| Total | | 15 | 111 | 162 | 74 | 5 | 367 |

Table 3 shows that only 15 respondents disagreed with the statement as compared with those who agreed with the statement the value of which is 79. In total 126 respondents were disagreeing that there is a significant relationship between faculty's perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion policies and the stated pay and promotion policies in public sector universities while the number of respondents agreeing with the statement is 79. The reason being that the questions, in the PoPs tool being used regarding pay and promotion, were reverse coded. Therefore, researchers can conclude not only that there is an association between the variables, but they can also describe the association. The researcher can conclude that there is a significant relationship between faculty's perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion policies and the stated pay and promotion policies in public sector universities.

Table 4

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 16.102a | 16 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 94.229 | 16 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .151 | 1 | .697 |
| N of Valid Cases | 367 | | |

Table 4 portrays the high two-tailed significant correlation relationship between workers' fulfillment in regards to paying and advancement and the expressed compensation and advancement approaches in a higher education seat of learning. With $n=367$ the chi-square is 16.102 with alpha 0.05 which is considered significant to be concomitant at a 95% confidence interval for the research to be effective. Consequently, the scholar presumes that there is a significant relationship between workers' supposed fulfillment with regard to pay and advancement guidelines in an HEI.

Qualitative Findings

The following themes emerged from the qualitative findings.

Perceptions of Organizational Politics

Politics is a hard reality, despite the fact that many people will not accept it. It is very much there and different people view it differently. To some, it is a necessity. To others, it is a waste of time and resources. Some even say that without it you cannot survive without it especially when there is a scarcity of resources. Employees usually feel insecure in an environment where they are not treated with justice. There are also employees who would know how to find a way around politics and still be able to achieve their goals.

A head of the department gave his views about politics by saying:

“Politics is important because without getting involved we cannot survive. We cannot get our rights... Without making a group you cannot get success...”

Pay and Promotion

The respondents were unanimous in saying that they do not have any issues with the paying policies since pay policies are stated and the faculty knows about those policies. However, they showed their dissatisfaction with the policies of promotion. Promotion is something that an employee looks forward to as a result of his/her efforts. If a due reward is not given, then we are likely to have a demotivating factor in an organization. Usually in organization promotion criteria is quite clear. It was evident from the responses of the participants that the promotion criteria in public sector universities are quite shrouded and unclear.

One of the respondents shared his bitter experience by saying:

“Paying policy is definitely stated in the public sector. It is according to the BPS (Basic Pay Scale) and it is the same throughout Pakistan. Yes, we have issues with promotion... we have cases of nepotism and favoritism... Promotions are politically controlled.”

Discussion

With reference to the first research question, the analysis highlighted that there is a significant relationship between employees' perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion and the stated pay and promotion policies in a higher education institution. In such a situation the employees are most likely to become disenchanted and would tend to give little importance to the management policies regarding pay and promotion. As stated earlier in the literature review by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) that although the decision makers might not be doing it consciously, it's the way the HR policies and systems that are developed and practiced that reward the individual having political behavior and punish those who do not get involved in influence tactics.

Working in such a politically oriented institution becomes really hard for those employees, who would rather concentrate on the given work rather than become part of the political tactics. Gull and Zaidi (2012) concluded that the opinion of employees about others' self-centered behavior like treatment of supervisory policies is negatively linked to the work enjoyment level of the workforce. The implication of this significance is that employees tend to be more satisfied with their jobs when they get pay and promotion according to their potential and also when the pay promotion policies of the firm are in their favor.

The analysis confirmed that there is a huge difference between the stated pay and promotion policies and the perceived pay and promotion policies. Faculty members do not have any issues with the pay, however, they showed a lot of reservations regarding the promotion criteria (Kezar, et al., 2019). Pay is not an issue in the public sector since the teachers are paid according to the government pay scale (BPS). Promotion is the actual issue.

The criteria for promotion are tricky in the sense that if a faculty qualifies for a particular post he cannot be promoted to the next level unless a post falls vacant which might take several years. After that post is vacant that post has to be advertised and the faculty waiting for the promotion has to contest with everyone who has applied for the post. So in such a situation a deserving faculty may or may not get selected for a well-deserved promotion. Such a scenario has all the ingredients in pushing a committed and hardworking faculty into politics (Dappa, Bhatti, & Aljarah 2019).

Keeping in view the second research question, the analysis highlighted that there is a significant relationship between perceived pay and promotion and the employees' job satisfaction in higher education institutions. The reward system is something that is designed by the management directly and the managerial staff has to comply with it (Malmi, & Brown 2008). One cannot help but agree with the statement that the organizations are responsible for the political behavior of their employees through their reward system (Ferris et al., 1989; Ferris & King, 1991; Kacmar & Ferris, 1993).

In an environment where promotions are given out on the basis of political affiliation then hard working and committed employees are bound to be disenchanted. Gull and Zaidi (2012) highlighted the very issue in their study by stating that when the perception about politics is on a high level, the job satisfaction would be low or vice versa. They concluded that the management should streamline their human resource in such a way that it does not become destructive and a breeding ground for dissatisfied employees. As concluded by Shields and Ward (2001) that employees who are dissatisfied with the promotion opportunities or are denied such opportunities are likely to show a higher intention of leaving the job.

It is human nature that if they are shown the prospects of a reward in the form of a promotion or pay increase employees are likely to work harder with increased commitment and dedication. Pergamit and Veum (1989) concluded that the more there are chances for promotion for an employee in an organization the higher would be his satisfaction level. De Souza (2002) and Chillakuri, (2020) concluded that when employees see that there are going to be opportunities for promotion, quite naturally they would feel satisfied with their respective positions in the organization.

The analysis of the interviews concluded that faculty members do not have any issues as far as pay is concerned because the public sector employees are paid according to the Basic Pay Scale (BPS) in which an employee gets a fixed increment every year. Hence, salary is not an issue for them, they are more concerned about their promotion. The promotion criteria have been made so difficult that it becomes very difficult for a deserving faculty member to get promoted on merit (González, et al., 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded from this research that political affairs exist in every association and universities are no exemption. With regards to politics, teachers act the same way as workers in any other organization. A study by Vigoda-Gadot (2003) reasoned that workers considered politics at the workplace as a way to accomplish individual goals at the expense of other workers regardless of whether that accomplishment was at the expense of the entire association. This research likewise highlighted a solid relationship between the faculty's supposed contentment with respect to pay and advancement and the universities' compensation and advancement procedures. This is how organizations play their role in politics (Olufayo & Akinbo, 2022). They may not do it intentionally, but the wage system and the promotion criteria are kept vague and employees are kept in the dark about it (Furnham & Taylor 2004). Kacmar and Ferris (1991) opined that political behavior will prosper in a setting where there are no rules. When employees are assured of a just promotion and reward system their satisfaction level would automatically increase and when employees see that promotion and reward are based on political affiliation they would react in a negative way (Wright & Boswell 2002). Based on the research outcomes, this study has the following recommendations to make:

- The HR management should ensure that there is a proper accountability system in place to ensure transparency and justice (Androniceanu, 2021). Many times, the head of the department tends to manipulate the careers of the faculty and the management is unaware of the happenings. The management takes time to realize the slip, but by then it is too late. It is, therefore, advised that there should a proper check on the respective head of the department as well.
- It is also recommended that the management should realize that politics

is almost a way of life and that they cannot entirely eliminate it but, they can work towards minimizing it (Thompson & Warburton, 2019). This realization is going to show them the way forward.

- It is also recommended that HR should use a multiple-tier system of the appraisal so that they do not have to rely on just what the head of the department has to say about a particular faculty. The 360-degree evaluation framework can be one of the new frameworks for assessing the teachers in the universities which tries to offer more authentic acknowledgment and information by collecting various perspectives from various sources (Filtcher & Baldry, 2000).

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