

## THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE POLITICS ON ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Organization emphasizes corporate unity in which all employees work with consistent strategies cascaded down through the various levels and processes. The study examined the effect of politics on workplace relationship vis-à-vis effective and efficient service delivery in various organizations. It is imperative for strategic positions to be occupied and decisions to be made that will drive the affairs of an administrative system amidst interpersonal relationship, lobbying and interference of different phases. The internet, theses, journals, archival materials and the vast expanse of literature assisted in no small measure in sourcing for relevant information to distil the subject matter of this paper. The author found evidences of pervasive tendencies for fleece behaviours among administrative officials despite standard rules and regulations guiding all activities. The paper concluded among others that politics influenced strategic and tactical decisions as well as organization development

**Keynotes:** *Organization, Politics, Workplace, Development, Employee, Strategic*

### INTRODUCTION

In the modern day organization objectives, public or private organization, military or civilian, educational or social organization, manufacturing or service organizations e.t.c, increasing their competitive advantage by providing better and quality service to their customers or patronage is at the core. One strategy associated with sustaining such competitive advantages is to develop an effective and efficient human resource. In all types of organizations, inevitable human resource challenges such as recruiting qualified employees, controlling a high turnover rate, paying low wages, and maintaining the performance of employee is undisputedly

reoccurring. Undoubtedly, human resources management cannot free from politicking among people of different background, ethnicity, education and disposition to issues of common importance.

An important factor which affects the performance of an employee at work is perception of organizational politics. Politics is a common phenomenon of almost every organization. It is unlikely to have a politics free organization because organizations are social entities where employees make efforts individually and in groups for valued resources, struggle for power and positions, involve in conflicts and its resolution and execute different influential tactics to get the benefits and serve their self or individual interests (Ogwuche, 2014). Therefore, organizational politics is the severe problem which is being faced by the human resource management nowadays in both public and private sectors. Karen (2014) opined that organizational politics is the pursuit of individual agenda and self-interest in an organization without regard to their effect on the organizations efforts to achieve its goals or objectives, or organizational development and sustainability.

Workplace politics represent deceitful behaviour of employees toward the work environment for personal interest which may not be in harmony with group and organizational objectives and subsequently may have effect on its development. Problem of workplace politics may include unqualified employees in a strategic position, wrong decision making, waste of resources of organization, fraud and problem of sustainability. Unqualified employee may get appointed to hold a strategic position of an organization provided he/she understands the devious behaviour to get it. This will have great effect on the decision making of an organization such as effective use of available resources and other noneconomic decisions. The result of wrong decision may include fraud or misappropriation, waste of resources and retardation of organizational development.

The research was conducted to identify and examine theoretically, the impact of workplace politics on organization development and

challenges it may pose to human resources management, organization process and, tactical and strategic planning and decisions in an organization. The study explored internet material, thesis, journal, archival material and the vast expanse of literature in the area of organization politics to examine the effect of workplace politics on organization development.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study intends to provide answers to the following questions;

1. What are the necessities of workplace politics on organization development?
2. What are the threats which workplace politics may pose to organization development?
3. How can negative effects of workplace politics on organization development be minimized?

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Workplace Politics**

Nihat, Samet and Ozgur (2016) defined workplace politics as the use of power in order to obtain results that are either not approved by the workplace or organization or use tools that are also not approved by the organization. Although there are many different definitions of workplace politics, these definitions agree that workplace politics is a set of social-influencing processes, which are experienced within an organization in order to prevent short-or long-term individual benefits.

Mintzberg in Mustafa and Murat (2012) defined workplace politics as informal, parochial, typically divisive and illegitimate behavior that is aimed at displacing legitimate power in different ways. Workplace politics is also seen as a social influence process in which behavior is strategically designed to maximize self-interest. They are those actions that are not officially approved by an organization taken to influence others to meet one's personal goals. Types of political behaviors include acting against the organization procedures, sucking up to the boss and lobbying executive managers with an aim to get privileged treatment, such as special work assignments and/or advancement, undermining one's rival at work in order to advance personally and not sharing valuable

knowledge with other personnel. While these kinds of behaviors are condoned by the organization, they are generally not absolutely prohibited (Mustafa and Murat, 2012). While political behaviour existing in an organization or workplace are not in congruence with standard operating procedures, and policies, yet it is not prohibited or banned by any organization, even though, it has great influence on the standard operating policies.

Dubrin in Shamaila and Aylia (2012) considered workplace politics as an unofficial advancement for attaining power. Similarly it could be explained by achieving power through various ways except merit or fortune. It could be described that politics are used mainly to achieve power, either by hook or by crook. These all have done for personal benefits for example for getting promotion, obtaining huge funds or other resources, or getting hankering projects. Workplace politics started getting attention when the concept of organizational rationality was challenged because of the emergence of concepts like person-organization misfit, and incompatibility of personal and organizational goals. The concept of organizational rationality was based on the idea that individuals decide their goals by keeping in view the organizational goals and are expected to work for the achievement of their personal goals according to the rules and regulations of the organization. But a realistic picture of life at workplace showed the existence of conflicting goals within the organization. This existence of conflicting goals in organizations gave birth to organizational politics (Ogwuche, 2014).

### **Factors Responsible for Workplace Politics**

There are several factors that are responsible for workplace politics. Among these factors are:

1. **Equity:** Leaders have to engage in politics to achieve goals. But the litmus test should be why they use politics. If political tactics are used to advance causes in the organization that serve to benefit everyone equally, then they are more likely to be seen as purposeful and legitimate. Power, influence and politics have some effect on every member of an organization and thus on the entire organizational unit. Based on the equity theory and on the idea of social exchange and social

reciprocity, the motivation to perform better and the development of positive employee attitudes and behaviours, depend on the display of similar positive attitudes and behaviours by other four members of the organization (peers, supervisors, the management and the organizations as a whole). Therefore, many scholars have argued that the relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is an important one that deserves careful and thorough investigation and one that has the potential to enhance our understanding of multiple aspects of performance.

2. **Promotion:** According to Robbins and Judge cited in Ogwuche (2014), promotion decisions have consistently been found to be one of the most political actions in organizations. The opportunity for promotion or advancement encourages people to compete for limited resources and try to positively influence the decision outcome. This implies that at the root of office politics is the issue of manipulation. Manipulation can be present in any relationship where one or more of the parties involved uses indirect means to achieve their goals. In the workplace, where resources are limited, individuals often have an incentive to achieve their goals at the expense of their colleagues. For example, if six people apply for one promotion, they might expect the selection to be made purely on merit. If one of the candidates were to believe that this would put them at a disadvantage, they may use other means of coercion or influence to put themselves into an advantageous position. When those who have fallen subject to the manipulation begin to talk to each other directly-or when other evidence comes to light such as financial results-the manipulator will have an explanation ready but will already be planning their exit, as they are driven to stay in control, not to face a revelation which would expose their behaviour.
3. **Power:** There is some confusion concerning the proximate terms which are often represented together when workplace politics is discussed. The most commonly used and definitely one of the most important synonymous is “power”. It has been widely recognized that both politics and power are significant

part of human behaviour as they affect the ability to secure one's goals and interests in a social system. (Ogwuche, 2014).

### **Impact of Workplace Politics on Organization Activities**

Workplace politics, like other factors affecting organizational performance, productivity, profitability and sustainability is like a two side of coin, having its face and bottom, that is, positive and negative implications. It will be erroneous to assume politics in workplace only have negative impact on the organizational productivity. There are positive and negative sides of workplace politics.

### **Positive Side of Workplace Politics**

**Competitiveness:** Competition is believed to usually results into effectiveness and efficiency in social phenomenon. Politicking within an organization will brings out the quality of aspirant or people aspiring for leadership position, giving those responsible to choose the opportunity to pick the best that will ensure optimum organizational productivity. For instance, in the process of lobbying for a position, aspirant would have stated his/her plan and how to achieve those goals, giving those responsible to make decision the chance for assessment of the person most qualifies for the position.

**Efficient Decision Making:** More than one alternative on any decision enhance efficiency in decision making. The act of workplace politics between two or more people aspiring for the same position will enhance efficient decision as to the best candidate to fill the aspired position.

**Perception of Conflicts:** Workplace politics has inherent ability to bring possibility of conflict to the fore, get them addressed and improve on the process of choosing leaders or filling vacant positions in an organization. This ability will help the organization in achieving its goal to the extent that cannot be quantified in monetary term.

**Quality of Leadership:** Politicking at workplace enhances the quality of leaders. Different people lobbying for the same position will state their qualities and agenda for the position. These will enhance decisions by those who are in the position to select the leader, by evaluating the most competent aspirant.

**Effective Means of Grapevine:** Politics in workplace is an effective means of gathering information through informal means. Management of the organization will be able to have access to wide range of information about those aspiring for various positions through people talking about it and discussing about the person's antecedents.

### **Negative Side of Workplace Politics**

**Conflict:** Conflict is inevitable in any organization, where there are more than two persons working together for common goal. Politicking in workplace improve the tendency for conflict in an organization. It is possible that the most qualified person will not be chosen ahead of those that know how to manage their way and very close with power that be, in an organization. Those who felt cheated may find it difficult to work harmoniously with the selected person. Organization must put in place various mechanism to resolve resultant conflict from workplace politics.

**Defective Leadership:** Workplace politics most times result into incompetent leaders (Yara, 2017). Leadership most time is not only about academic qualifications. It requires personal qualities such as ability to work under pressure, investigative ability, listening hear, forecasting skills, planning and decision making ability etc. These, most times do not come with academic qualifications and training. Lobbying and politicking in workplace may not give room for evaluation of the above mentioned abilities, resulting into defective leadership.

**Poor Management:** Leadership determines the quality of management team and performance of the organization. Politicking in workplace usually results into poor management since competent persons have been outsmarted by the technique of lobbying and game plays. The effect of poor management is not only on the immediate performance of the organization, but sustainability.

**Hatred and Lack of Trust:** Workplace politics breeds hatred and lack of trust in an organization. Those that were outsmarted may find it difficult to work with the chosen one. The outsmarted staff will not be able to trust the selected person, and may find it difficult to have informal communication with such person, and informal

communication has great influences in achieving organizational goals and objectives.

**Enhance Mediocrity:** Workplace politics is synonymous with mediocrity. There is the possibility of choosing the least qualified person provided the person is very close to the power that be in the organization. For instance, if the basic requirement for the position of the Dean of Faculty in an institutional setting is Chief Lecturer. It is possible the selected person will be a Chief Lecturer without prior knowledge or experience in that area or related area, and someone with the same or more than Chief Lecturer with relevant experience will not be selected. This only occurs where there is room for mediocrity over meritocracy, due to closeness with power that be, in the institution.

**Job Dissatisfaction:** Promotion, Meritocracy and fair level playing ground for all staff, will go a long way in improving the job satisfaction. Staffs that are qualified for one position or the other should be given equal level playing ground. Kiptoo (2015) stated that politicking in workplace resulting to selection of a position may result to job dissatisfaction.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical thrust is anchored on the four typologies of organizational politics developed by Michael Jarrett; **The Weed, The Rock, The High Ground and The Wood**. Each term represent various sources of influences within an organization that result into politics in decisions and occupying position in an organization. The Weed is politics supported by personal influence and informal networks within an organization rule. It is a dynamic that grows naturally, without any maintenance. He asserts that, dealing with the weeds will require getting involved to understand the strength and weakness of the informal network at play, identify the key brokers, so as to understand whether they are doing more harm than good. The Rock describes power that rests on individual interactions and formal sources. It might include influence arising from membership of high status group within the organization. This politics relies on formal sources of power, rather than fighting against them. The Rock is equivalent to the kind of power and political behaviour that inspired Max Weber on his classic book



Bureaucracy. The High Ground combines formal authority with organizational rules, guidelines, structure and procedures that form the basis of political activities within the organization. It provides guide rails for the rocks that are a functional political process that uses structures of control systems, incentives and sanctions that keeps the organization in compliance. The Wood is politics derived from organizational implicit norms, hidden assumptions and unspoken routines. It provides cover and safety for people in your organization. Michael asserts that this quadruple proposition helps to understand the political terrain which help Chief Executives fight dysfunctional politics within an organization.

### **DISCUSSION OF IDENTIFIED ISSUES**

Workplace politics and their processes are often understood to be the organizational defensive routines that alter and filter legitimate information and procedures. It is a human nature action that arises out of quest for control of information, power and task within an organization. The literature reviewed and the theoretical basis show that the impact of workplace politics may be positive or negative, depending on the aim at which such politicking is being used. Workplace politics according to Michael Jarrett is discussed as follows;

- a) The weed, which emanate from personal influence and informal network within an organization has positive and negative impact on organization performance and productivity. Workplace politics which is based on personal influence can ensure peaceful and healthy relationship among workers that will facilitate effective decision making and interpersonal relationship which will enhance productivity. It has the inherent ability to bring conflict to the fore, get them addressed and lay a basis to prevent future occurrence. Through informal network, top management can identify the strength and weakness of the organization and how activities can be improved upon. This informal network can assist management in pilot study of new strategy and workers disposition to it. Despite these prodigious good effects, personal influence and informal network has great negativity that tends to impede the achievements of organization goals

and objectives. For instance, the basis of Weber's bureaucracy is to eliminate personal decision and danger of informal network in an organization, thereby advocate for established rules to guide activities in an organization. Personal influence tends to give room for selfish interest overriding corporate goals, and also has the tendency for continuous conflicts in an organization. The prevention or elimination of this personal influence and informal network, and its negative effect is within the scope of application of management theories such as Weber's bureaucracy, Fayol's 14 principles of management, Gulick's ten principles of management etc.

- b) The Rock emanates from power derived from individual interactions and formal position. This workplace politics is inevitable in both private and public sector, as people tend to use their formal position to influence procedure, decisions and group actions. This kind of power can be of importance during conflict resolution and a method of resolving it. Power from individual interaction and formal sources is necessary for making urgent decisions in an organization that will enhance organization productivity. Despite its importance, when used for personal gains it tends to affect organizational development and sustainability. Michael asserts that this kind of power inspired Weber's bureaucracy to prevent such negative effect of power from individual interaction and formal position.
- c) The High Ground is politics that arises from combination of formal authority with established rules, guidelines and procedures. There are usually basic requirements and standard for occupying position and strategic offices, which are spelt out in organization rules, guidelines and procedures. Those rules and guidelines ensure activities within the organization are channeled toward the achievement of its established goals. In workplace, people tend to explore the loop holes in such rules and guidelines for personal gains and politicking, which may jeopardize the main objectives of the organization.
- d) The Wood, which is politics with basis from organizational implicit norms and unspoken routines, has the tendency to

alter information and procedure within an organization. Workers, especially those with long serving experience tend to take advantage of their years of experience to influence the decision of those young employees, with the idea of “this is how we do it here” and kind of mentorship-loyalty relationship with new employees. This kind of power is essential for managing organizational conflicts, smooth implementation of new strategies and policies. Wrong usage of this kind of power tends to affect organizational sustainability and development. Therefore, management of an organization must check those unspoken routine and hidden assumption that can affect organization activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The notion that members of organizations work for the common goal of achieving organization objectives may not be achievable in all settings, especially wherein political actions are in place. The combination of different groups of people and plurality of culture, training, background and education will have great influence on the relationship in a workplace. These traits will in no small measures affect politics in workplace. Organization is bound to fill strategic positions that are vacant, in which more than one person will be qualified. The selection procedure and process, which are affected by workplace politics, will have great influence in organization planning, decision making and leadership quality in the workplace, as well as the performance and productivity of organization.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The followings are recommended for the amelioration of the negative effects of workplace politics on organization development;

1. Every organization should have standard procedures for filling vacant posts, either by selection or by election, with explicit requirements for those positions.
2. Organizations should imbibe the idea of outsourcing in the procedure of selecting people to fill vacant positions.
3. Strategies or mechanism should be in place for managing conflict or disagreement that may arise in the process of filling vacant positions. Conflict is inevitable, but its management

will have great influence on organization performance and development.

4. Organization should ensure level playground for all staff qualified employees to occupy a vacant position to avoid conflict.
5. Gossip and Grapevine should not be encouraged within the organization.

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**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Omowunmi Joshua Olusegun, (2019), The Impact of Workplace Politics on Organization Development: a Theoretical Perspective. J. of Management and Corporate Governance, Vol.11, No. 1, Pp 1-14

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