

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS FOR POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOURS AMONG LIS PROFESSIONALS: A CONCEPTUAL GUIDE

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ABSTRACT

Organizational politics is a common phenomenon that has attracted the concerns of many scholars. It is often seen from the negative perspective but some researchers have faulted the ideology maintaining that there are positive aspects of organizational politics. Against this background, this paper seeks to provide a thematic review of the understanding and managing of organizational politics for positive engagement and behaviours among LIS professionals. Specifically, this paper presents a literary discourse on organizational politics and the perspectives of organizational politics. The paper also identifies the predominant organizational politics in tertiary institutions as well as possible factors influencing them. The strategies for managing the political behaviour within the context of the library were also revealed. In conclusion, the paper established that organizational politics is a necessary evil that cannot be totally eradicated from organizations including tertiary institutions. It is also ascertained that having a proper understanding and adopting appropriate management strategies could go a long way to minimize the negative effects of organizational politics thus creating a friendly work environment for positive engagement and behaviours within tertiary institutions and libraries. It is recommended among others that the management team of tertiary institutions and library management should constantly observe the work environment for possible factors that could fuel upheavals within the system, employ the right persons for the right positions, and maintain an open and transparent communication system. The paper suggests an empirical analysis to establish the extent to which the organizational politics identified in this paper could affect the work commitment of LIS professionals in university libraries.

Keywords: Politics, Organizational Politics, Political Behaviour, Power, Influence, LIS Professionals.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Politics is a concept that is unavoidably present in almost all organizations including tertiary institutions. This is obvious since employees in such organizations have divergent concerns, values, aspirations, and opinions setting up the potential for conflicting interests. The idea of managing conflicting interests for either personal or organizational growth brings the idea of organizational politics. Organizational politics is simply the application of politics to the activities of organizations. It provides a means of determining the authoritative allocation of

resources to different functional units and members within the institution. To put it simply, organizational politics could be seen as a game of wit for determining who gets what, when, and how within the context of the system. Cacciatolo (2015) argues that organizational politics, though often seen by many in the negative sense, has the capability of influencing the job performance of employees (including LIS professionals) either positively or negatively.

LIS professionals commonly known as librarians are knowledge managers who are professionally and intellectually trained in the art and science of acquisition, handling, management, repackaging, and delivery of relevant information. They are essentially the intermediaries between information offerings, information systems, and information users. Librarians, like other categories of staff, operate in a complex political environment where there are competing goals, values, motives, etc., which could generate some sort of organizational politics. This political struggle has a lot of potential consequences on work outcomes and organizational processes. It is unavoidably important that librarians explore organizational politics in its entirety to be able to have a clear understanding of what constitutes organizational politics within the library and its host institution.

Chen, Jiang, and Wus (2021) note that individuals with political skills tend to do better in gaining more personal power as well as managing stress and job demands, than their politically naïve counterparts. Consequently, librarians have to intuitively realize the need to acquire political skills and gain proper understanding that the outcome of organizational politics needs to be managed and handled with care, sincerity, and maturity before escalating out of control. Against this background, this paper examines the literary discourse on organizational politics, perspectives of organizational politics, predominant organizational politics in tertiary institutions, factors influencing organizational politics in tertiary institutions vis-à-vis libraries and strategies for managing the political behaviour within the context of the library.

2.0 LITERARY DISCOURSE ON ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

Politics began in the 1970's with the focus on aspects of power and bureaucracy in workplaces as regards management and leadership (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). The authors acknowledge that the concept received only fragmented exposure in literature prior to the 1980's and associates the phenomenon primarily with conflict. Politics has gradually gained prominence in the literary world especially in the fields of sociology, social psychology, management, anthropology, and political science (Robbins, 2001). Today, politics is widely discussed as an influencing factor in all fields of knowledge including librarianship. Politics could be seen as a concept incorporating elements of behaviour that are formal and informal, sanctioned and non-sanctioned, focused on the use of power and influence to achieve individual or and organizational goals. To Jarrett (2017), politics is an influencing process along with norms, formal authority, and expertise within organizations.

Organizational politics refers to a variety of activities carried out by people in an organization to acquire, enhance, and use power and other resources to obtain preferred outcome. It is the informal, unofficial, and sometimes behind-the-scene efforts capable of influencing activities either positively or negatively within and beyond organizations. Mustafa and Murat cited in Olusegun (2019) define organizational politics as informal, parochial, typically divisive and illegitimate behaviour that is aimed at displacing legitimate power in different ways. It is a

social influence process in which behaviour is strategically designed to maximize self-interest. According to Cacciattolo (2015), positive organizational politics is aimed at achieving organizational efficiency whereas negative organizational politics serves self-interest above that of the organization. Although negative politics is often seen as outside normal practices with negative actions but it could be used to bring positive results to individuals or groups of persons thus, enhancing job effectiveness in workplaces. For instance, a library manager may adopt lobbying to influence the decision of the management on library funding and other issues related to library which by implication could enhance librarians' job productivity. In such case, the action may be negative but the outcome is beneficial to the library and the institution at large.

Generally, organizational politics stirs up images of back-room dealings, manipulations, or hidden powers used for gaining advantage at the expense of others. The idea of organizational politics stems from the view that in every organization, there are different employees with diverse interests, values, personalities, and intentions and what have you. These variations seem to create administrative frictions which need to be resolved or ascertained for the organization to grow. Therefore, organizational politics is applied as a means of recognizing and ultimately reconciling the competing variations within the organization. Drory & Vigadot-Godot (2010) highlight that organizational politics has a lot of potential consequences on work outcome and can affect processes such as promotion opportunities, rewards, allocation of resources, salary adjustments, appointments, among others.

3.0 PERSPECTIVES OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

According to Gotsis and Kortezi (2010), organizational politics could be seen from two perspectives: as a social influence process and as a self-interest process.

As a Social Influence Process: Organizational politics is regarded as a social influence process when it is aimed at achieving individual goals and organizational goals and definitely not against the interest of the organization. This could be seen as normal everyday politics or 'good' politics that elicits legitimate political behaviour among librarians. Such behaviours include complaining to supervising officers (divisional heads), bypassing the chain of command, forming coalitions, obstructing organizational decisions through inaction or excessive adherence to rules, and developing influential contacts outside the library. These behaviours could culminate into constructive actions with positive outcomes like higher productivity, job satisfaction, career advancement, higher innovation, and decision-making consensus. Cacciattolo (2015) is of the opinion that such organizational politics provides basis for competitive advantages and supports desired feeling of trust, confidence, and sincerity among staff.

As a Self-interest Process: When organizational politics is viewed as a self-interest process, it means it is adopted for achieving personal goals at the expense of organizational goals. This is often referred to as bad politics that affects job performance negatively. It generates conflicts, hatred, rancor, low productivity, and indiscipline within the organization. The players in this form of politics are known as "hardball players" who often violate the implied rules of the game. They are involved in illegitimate political behaviours or negative actions like attacking or blaming others, sabotage, whistle blowing, concealing important information, lobbying for

preferred alternatives, favoritism, taking credit for other people's contributions and 'scapegoating'. These actions could be exhibited by librarians in the pursuit of individual agenda and self-interest without considering their effects on the library's efforts to achieve its predetermined goals.

4.0 PREDOMINANT ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The organizational politics elements applied in different units or divisions at different levels within tertiary institutions are numerous but for the purpose of this study, persuasion, informal hierarchies, ingratiation, co-workers influence, and reciprocity are reviewed.

Persuasion: This is the act of making somebody agree to do something or believe something. Persuasion seems to be the most widely exhibited political behaviour among librarians in tertiary institutions. It is observed that people get what they need or expect easily by trying to convince the involving parties with reasons, logic, value, and facts. Sometimes, they use their charisma, voluntary commitments, peer power, authority, and verbal skills to persuade other people above and below them to accept their ideas or offer. It remains a fact that most librarians, who pursued their personal agenda or interest, most times apply persuasion to get what they want.

Informal Hierarchies/Groups: Every organization has an organizational chart that represents formal hierarchy. It is the formal hierarchy that defines the reporting structure and who works for whom. As the organization grows in size, politics set in and produce other hierarchies that could be regarded as informal. The informal hierarchies are special interest groups that are temporarily formed with the aim of protecting the interest of members (clique) against the inevitable power imbalance within the organization. They are usually not considered as part of the formal organizational structure but they exert powerful influence on job productivity and satisfaction. Examples of informal groups are cliques, cabals, and unions.

Ingratiation: This form of organizational politics involves getting someone into a good mood prior to making request or proposal. It involves using tactics to control other people's impression towards gaining favour from them. Asadullah, Haider, Heredero, & Musaddiq (2016) note that ingratiation is a deliberate display of behaviours which are usually preferred by the target supervisors. It includes being friendly, helpful, and using praise, flattery or humor to increase one's attractiveness to supervisors or build personal image, and to maintain and manage the supervisors' impression or satisfy prosocial motives (Meriac & Villanova in Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006).

Co-workers Influence: Influence implies a willing acquiescence on the part of the subjects and more subtle processes at work than would be expected if power was being applied. Every employee, from the junior or lowly placed to the senior or highly perched, has the potential to be a compelling force on the attitudes, actions, values, opinions, characters, and behaviours of his or her co-workers either formally or informally. The capacity for such influence may stem from a person's position, relationship, admiration, or respect for the individual (O'hair & Wieman, 2012). That means, librarians can use informal-formal mechanisms to produce effects on the character, development, or behaviour of other staff either for personal or organizational

interest. Although, influence is a softer term than power but it has both positive and negative implications and could be downward, lateral or upward (Bohns & Flynn, 2013).

Reciprocity: This is also known as exchange tactics, social exchange or lobbying. It allows workers to make explicit or implicit promises (cash or kind) in exchange for favour from their superiors or co-workers without passing through due process. Reciprocity is built on the premise that “if you will do something for me, I will do something for you.” It is observed that workers who apply reciprocity usually get protection from their boss or superior no matter how bad they behave at work place and any attempt of victimizing them will not prevail. When this exchange continues over a period of time, it could lead to an alliance in which two or more persons join in a longer-term power group to get benefits that they mutually desire.

5.0 FACTORS INFLUENCING ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The factors that influence organizational politics in tertiary institutions could be viewed in two categories – individual factors and organizational factors.

Individual Factors: These are factors that relate with personality traits and desires that are capable of influencing librarians’ engagement and commitment to work. It is believed that librarians that are high self-monitors are more sensitive to social cues, exhibits high level of social conformity and are more likely to engage in political behaviour than low self-monitors (Robbins, 2001). Librarians with high desire to dominate others and high level of confidence are likely to have control over their work environment and as such prone to take proactive efforts to manipulate situations and convert their power to action in their favour. These inherent attitudes in them make them “unnecessarily” determinant and comfortable using politics as a means to further their self-interest at the expense of other co-workers and possibly the organization.

Organizational Factors: Political activity in organizations is probably more a function of the organization’s characteristics than of individual variables (Robbins, 2001). The reason is that every organization has a number of staff with individual traits and desires, yet the extent of political behaviour is minimal without disrupting organizational efficiency. When organizations are not sincere and transparent in the reallocation of resources, promotion decisions, and appointment opportunities, conflict and politicking could be stimulated. A lot of political behaviours could be displayed within the organization when there is low trust among library staff. It is believed that high trust suppresses the level of political behaviour in general and inhibits illegitimate actions in particular (Robbins, 2001). Again, unclear performance evaluation system, high performance pressure, and role ambiguity are factors that could motivate staff to engage in politics. Sometimes, politics is encouraged when staff are rewarded for engaging in political behaviour. For instance, a librarian is given a higher responsibility/position out of his or her political engagement with the top management or the authority that be.

6.0 POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS ON LIS PROFESSIONALS

Organizational politics, if not managed properly and promptly could create an unhealthy environment and work behaviour. Its effects could be felt in tertiary institutions at individual, department, group, and managerial levels. However, the possible effects of organizational politics are perceptible on the following areas:

Concentration: Concentration is an important element for job engagement and positive behaviour and lack of it is disastrous to both the staff and the employer. Organizational politics could affect the concentration of librarians thereby distracting librarians from performing their duties and responsibilities effectively. In any politically driven environment, employees seem to be interested in negative activities that will give them undue advantage over other colleagues. They engage in several illegitimate behaviour or tactics with the intention of influencing certain decisions in their favour. It is a common practice in tertiary institutions that some librarians are becoming more interested in spoiling their colleagues' image in front of the superiors in order to gain favour, which otherwise would have been far-fetched. This political jockeying affects the concentration of librarians including those that are not political driven.

Attitude: Organizational politics changes librarians' attitude towards their job involvement. Political oriented librarians may not give in their best at work. They may be present at work for the sake of it, but never serious in their duties and responsibilities. Yet, they are capable of influencing organizational processes to satisfy their personal objectives. This situation could lead to acrimony and rivalries among librarians. Most librarians may lose interest in the job because they feel no matter how much efforts and hard-work they put in may not be noticed or rewarded. Organizational politics makes serious librarians have a change of attitude towards their job and this could lead to having bad feelings about their jobs, colleagues, supervisors, and the institution.

Work Environment: Work environment is supposed to be friendly, inviting and conducive enough to make people comfortable to perform excellently. The work environment embeds the physical ambience of the organization, working condition as well as existing relationship between employees and management as well as relationship with colleagues. Organizational politics could affect the work environment negatively or positively. For instance, organizational politics is fair and equitable to everyone is capable of enhancing a more friendly work environment which can be achieved through harmonious relationship between employees and management. On the other hand, organizational politics that undermines equity and fairness is bound to breed disharmony within the work environment and such hampers cooperation and effective services delivery. Typically, it is believed that organizational politics creates toxic or unfriendly work environment where people will not have the desired peace. Situations of hostile work environment will certainly increase stress, fuel wrong information, and generates distrust and lack of confidence among staff and confidence in management.

Misinformation: Misinformation is the act of giving false or misleading information either to deliberately deceive people or make them believe in what is not actually a true situation of things in an organization or a particular system. Bad organizational politics could cause misinformation through the spreading of rumors and fake news as a way of reacting to management or colleagues' ill-treatment. Bad organizational politics and political behaviour could cause hatred and bias among LIS professional which could trigger the creation of factions

in an organization. Bad organizational politics could also cause unwarranted accusation against some employees who are in the “bad book” of management.

Leadership: Leadership is a fundamental instrument through which tertiary institutions achieve their objectives of teaching, learning, research and community services. Leadership requires personal qualities such as ability to work under pressure, investigative ability, communication skills, and listening skills, forecasting skills, critical thinking ability, planning and decision-making skills. Organizational politics could affect leadership positively or negatively. Negative organizational politics oftentimes result into incompetent leadership because certain LIS professionals in leadership position do not possess requisite academic qualifications, training and experience. Bad organizational politics often through maneuvering and lobbying lead defective leadership. Bad organizational politics denies tertiary institutions opportunity to choose effective leaders and by extension the desired organizational development and quality services delivery.

Productivity: The success of every organization is measured by the level of its overall productivity. In the tertiary institutions, productivity is measured by how best and effective set objectives are being met on a sustainable basis. Specifically, the productivity of LIS professionals could be gauged by their consistent and quality contributions to teaching, learning and research purposes of their parent institutions. However, organizational politics have strong implications on the productivity of LIS professionals and the overall organizational productivity. According to Enyinna et al., (2014), bad organizational politics and political behaviour negatively affects employees’ productivity and lowers overall organizational productivity, while good organizational politics and political behaviour positively affects employees’ productivity and increases overall organizational productivity. Characteristically, bad organizational politics and political behaviour such as maneuvering, favouritism, and selective reward system breed conflict, hatred, absenteeism, rancor and low morale. This state of affairs if not well-managed could leads to lower productivity of affected LIS professionals as well as the overall productivity of the organization.

Demotivation: Organizational politics has the potential of causing demotivation among LIS professionals in tertiary institutions. Demotivation is the conscious and deliberate action of showing nonchalant or lackadaisical attitude towards organizational activities or assigned responsibilities as a way of reacting to some forms of ill-treatments in an organization. In other words, demotivation constitutes all actions and inactions of organizational management that kill or deactivate employees’ drive for effective service delivery. Bad organizational politics and political behaviours of favouring unqualified or less qualified LIS professionals with a more strategic position in tertiary institutions can demotivate the more qualified ones. For instance, unqualified LIS professional may get appointed to hold a strategic position in an organization simply because he/she understands the devious behaviour or bad politics of playing along with management. Such situation has a way of demotivating more qualified LIS professionals and by extension retard quality contributions to the development of the organization. A demotivated employee may report late to work, show little or no initiative in the performance of assigned duty, manifests a frosty relationship with others, and contribute less or nothing during meetings.

7.0 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS IN LIBRARIES

Organizational politics is a necessary evil that could be harmful or helpful to any organization, including libraries. In this light, its impact could be very destructive as well as constructive if properly checked. However, it is incumbent upon every library manager to technically manage organizational politics to avoid crises and for a desired result. For that reason, the following are proposed as strategies for managing organizational politics in libraries.

Understanding Political Systems in the Institutions: The adverse effects of political strategies in organizations including tertiary institutions could be dangerous. It could cause frustrations, job loss, depression, and dissatisfaction among staff members. Therefore, librarians need to have a proper understanding of the power equation in their institutions in order to deal with the politics in a tactful manner to avoid casualties. Library managers need to be alert to the level of involvement of librarians in politics and should be able to call the players to order when need arises.

Improving Recruitment Process: The ability to recruit personnel who are qualified, suitable, and competent to serve as staff is a fundamental building block in the management of organizational politics. It is a common tradition especially in Nigeria that people with the right skills seems not to be hired instead those with wrong skills may be considered. The reasoning behind this action is simple: they are highly connected and they are capable of trading money or something else for the job. Sometimes, the vacancies are not advertised and even when advertised, the qualified applicants may not be employed. The effects such mismatched individuals may have on the morale of other librarians could lead to organizational politics. Based on Uford (2017) opinion that HR efforts on work experience of the potential recruits should be pivotal in the recruitment process and they should focus their recruitment investments on target markets (qualified prospects) that consider working in the relevant industry, it could be deduced that library managers must ensure that the prospects with the right qualification, experience as well as positive character are recruited to meet the current and sometimes future needs of the libraries. It stands to reason that librarians who are not capable of doing their jobs to earn recognition, value, reward, etc., may engage in organizational politics to achieve their objectives.

Objective Allocation of Resources: Politics in organizations is fueled by limited resources to go around the members. Departmental budgets, allowances, imprest, sharing of facilities, salary increment are few examples of resources that could generate disagreement among members of the institution. That means, the key people in institutions will have to apply self-serving tactics to get what they perceive as a fair share of the limited resources. It is believed that if there are more resources to satisfy the interest of all the various constituencies, the politics would have been reduced. Again, the institutions need to adopt transparent and official principles to guide the allocation of the limited resources, in order not to generate unnecessary political struggle.

Ensuring Transparency in Communication System: It is often said that “secrets keep organizations sick”. The communication system should be transparent or open to dissuade employees from spreading rumours, build positive trust among colleagues and restrain them from deal-making and favouritism.

Establishing Staff Counseling Unit: Counseling could be regarded as a management strategy to curb organizational politics in libraries. This could be used to check staff excesses within the library.

Adopting Open Reporting and Assessment System: Open system is often referred as “walking the talk”. It also means doing what has been said or written. It is important that management of libraries adopt an open reporting system in order to encourage positive attitude among members of staff.

Minimizing Bureaucracy: Bureaucracy could be referred to as hierarchical administrative structure in which few members of the organization fit like cogs in a complex machine (Bhagwam & Bhushan, 2010). The authors note that bureaucracy could be likened to administrative bottle neck which has overriding negative effects on job performance. Long lines of communication, red-tapism (dogged and blind attachment to rules), excessive adherence to formalism, and inflexibility are concerned with bureaucracy. In any institution where bureaucracy is upheld at top gear, staff members are bound to apply different forms of organizational politics to achieve their personal objectives. At this instance, bureaucracy needs to be minimized for optimal job performances.

Growth Opportunities: Management should ensure that there are growth opportunities for all librarians by ensuring equity and transparency in appraisal and promotion of LIS professionals. This requires that relevant policies are effectively and fairly implemented across board while actions and responsibilities of all librarians are well-monitored and controlled within relevant acceptable guidelines. Management should also clearly and specifically define roles for all librarians as a way of shaping their attitude towards the performance of assigned roles.

8.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As already established, organizational politics cannot be eliminated in an ideal organization such as the libraries. In fact, organizational politics is a common phenomenon in the libraries as social institutions where LIS professionals and other members of staff make efforts individually and collectively for valued resources, struggle for power and positions, involve in conflicts and conflict resolutions as well as certain tactical actions and activities for personal benefits and interests. Characteristically, good organizational politics and political behaviour is essential in the achievement of organizational and individual goals and objectives, while bad organizational politics and political behaviour like political maneuvering is a spice for fear, hatred, rumour, rancor, acrimony, disharmony, unfriendly working environment and disincentive to higher productivity. Hence, bad organizational politics and political behaviours should necessarily be avoided for the entrenchment of good organizational politics and political behaviours in tertiary institutions.

However, in consideration of the pros and cons of organizational politics, it requires management and all librarians to effectively manage organizational politics by among other measures ensuring improved recruitment processes, clear definition of roles and policies, fairness and equity in promotion processes, open reporting system, effective conflict and grievance resolution processes as well as effective reward system for quality service delivery and higher performance of LIS professionals in the tertiary institutions.

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