Exploring Barriers Inhibiting the Effectiveness of leadership in Public Sector Organizations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore barriers inhibiting the effectiveness of leadership in public sector in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. A sample of thirty (n=30) employees were selected from education, health and agriculture departments in KP. In order to conduct in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, qualitative mood of inquiry was adopted. Data was collected from top, middle and lower management through semi-structure interview and it was analyzed through thematic analysis. It was concluded that public sector organizations such as agriculture, health and education are confronted with leadership crisis. There are poor communication skills, lack of relevant knowledge and expertise, managerial focus and inappropriate leadership style. The crises of organizational leadership are due to number of barriers such as lack of training and development, bureaucratic culture, undue political interference, lack of accountability and corruption. Due to these barriers, organizational leadership cannot play its instrumental role in organizational development, strategic focus and employees' teamwork and motivation.
Keywords: Leadership effectiveness, Public sector, Barriers, Organizations

Public sector plays a key role in providing fundamental services to community in all areas of public life. It is argued that public sector organizations serve people by safeguarding their interest, enable suitable environment for business and provide sound policies and information (Muhammad, 2007). In current days, public sector organizations have expanded enormously in providing various services such as people gain education from government schools, colleges and universities; they receive medical treatment from government hospitals, and are dependent heavily on public sector services and facilities (Hirsch, 1970). The fundamental importance of the public sector thus necessitates that these organizations need to be effective and efficient (Muhammad, 2007). However, it has been noticed that there is lack of effectiveness in these organizations in developing countries including Pakistan. According to Sayed, Anka, Abidi, & Shaikh (2012), public sector organizations in Pakistan are confronted with numerous challenges such as corruption, political interference, lack of proper resources, poor policy implementation, lack of commitment, unskilled work force and ineffective organizational leadership. Safdar (2012) adds that lack of

effective organizational leadership is one of the main factors responsible for in-effectiveness of public sector organizations.

Leadership plays a crucial role in the success and failure of organizations (Drucker, 1964). It is considered by many researchers as one of the key diving forces for improving organizational performance (Rowe, 2001). However, a growing body of research shows that organizational leadership is confronted with various barriers such as undue political interference, political instability, lack of effective coordination, weak internal control, lack of financial resources and poor communication (Davis, 1991). Existing studies for instance studies conducted by Malasa (2007), McCarthy et al. (2011) and Siu and Glover (2012) investigated barriers to leadership in the context of Malaysia, China and Irish public sector. These studies show the understanding of barriers to organizational leadership in those particular countries. Baring one odd research, indigenous studies on this issue in the context of Pakistan and especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are virtually non-existent. Baloch, Saleem, Zaman & Fida (2014) while investigating University of Peshawar found positively significant relationship of itsv leadership's emotional intelligence with the performance of their respective department. This shows that none of the studies have come up with an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the leadership that can explain the barriers inhibiting the effectiveness of leadership in public sector organizations. Thus, there is significant gap in the existing literature. Keeping in view the above mentioned situation, this study aims specifically to explore barriers creating hurdles for the effectiveness of leadership in public sector organizations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study fills the gap in existing literature and contributes to the limited literature. The findings of the study are helpful in enhancing the understanding of policy makers regarding barriers impeding the effectiveness of leadership particularly in the specific context of public sector organizations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Literature Review

Leadership effectiveness plays a key role in the success of public sector organizations (Drucker, 1964; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Effective leadership is one of the potential sources of management development, sustained competitive advantage and organizational performance (Avolio, 1999). Organizational leaders direct the actions and efforts of public sector officials throughout the system and help out subordinates in achieving organizational goal and objectives. However, a growing body of literature shows that organizational leaders face hurdles in performing their role effectively (Malasa, 2007). There are various challenges to organizational leaders in public sector organizations due to which achieving organizational goal and objectives

have become an uphill task. For example, Davis (1991) explains that organizational leaders are confronted with undue political interference, political instability, lack of effective coordination, weak internal control, lack of financial resources and poor communication. Bein (1997) adds that there are two types of barriers to organizational leadership, personal barriers and organizational barriers. The author further argues that personal barriers are due to personal weaknesses such as lack of relevant knowledge, skills and experience whereas organizational barriers are due to external environment such as political and cultural forces. McCarthy et al, (2011), find out that there is significant impact of barriers on organizational leadership. Citing the example of Irish public sector, it is argued that resistance to change, rigidity in the structure of public sector, influence of political system, civil service culture, and financial constraints have eroded the effectiveness of organizational leadership in Irish public sector. Evidence shows that crisis of organizational leadership is a growing concern in the public sector in developing countries (Dinavo, 1995). In a series of World Bank Reports (1983-1993), it is argued that bureaucracy has created an environment of corruption, inefficiency, absence of accountability, and resistance to change in developing countries. As a result, public sector organizations face hurdles in promoting welfare, bringing continuous development and providing equity and justice to citizens. Dinavo (1995) further explains that there is mismanagement in public sector in developing countries. For instance, Malasa (2007) finds out various barriers to leadership in education sector in Malaysia such as lack of initial preparation and support for on–going professional learning, lack of working environment, poor facilities and infrastructure, lack of communication and office equipment, lack of financial resources, policy and systemic issues and socio cultural and community problems. Similarly, Siu and Glover (2012) finds out that leadership in Chinese firms face hurdles due to rapid market change, governmental influence, inadequate market intelligence system, lack of appropriate human resource skills and ineffective production system. This shows that there is considerable impact of barriers on the effectiveness of leadership in public sector organizations. This situation is further summarized by Ramnarayan and Kumar (2004, p.1) that public sector is "over managed and under led" in developing countries. This shows that public sector organizations are run by a mindset that is not performing leadership role effectively.

Pakistan, being a developing country, also faces deterioration in public sector organizational performance. In this regard, Safdar (2012) and Afridi & Baloch (2015) find that public sector organizations in Pakistan are considered as one of the inefficient institutes of the country where poor governance, lack of carrier development, political influences, low salaries of public employees are causing brain drain of their human capital. A common problem is lack of commitment and dedication to the fundamental values of service and the interests of

officers to serve citizens. To align the mindsets of employees to the demands of organizational challenges, leadership is suggested as a solution. However, there are various barriers that are impeding the effectiveness of leadership. According to a series of World Bank Reports (1983-1993), there are various problems in Pakistani bureaucracy such as structural and administrative issues, lack of employees' motivation and commitment and corruption. A number of efforts were initiated in different times to improve governance but undue political interference and lack of accountability are the major hurdles towards the effectiveness of public sector organizations (Shafqat, 1999). The overall effects of bad governance in Pakistan often lead to shortage of public utility such as electricity, flour and other food items (Ali, Ali, & Raza, 2011). Common people of the country are going through miserable life (Ali et al., 2011). There is lack of accountability in public sector due to which politicians, military officials and bureaucrats tend to transfer money to other countries (Ali et al., 2011). In such circumstances, leadership in public sector fails to promote welfare, continuous development, and provide equity and justice to citizens. This is an alarming situation where traditional bureaucratic practices do not allow room for flexible decisions. Sial, Usman , Zulfiqar, Satti and Iftikhar (2013), argue that lack of resources, ineffective management, poor planning of execution and lack of integration among government departments are some of the reasons for lack of effectiveness in public sector. Organizational leaders are dictated by political entities that are providing basis for breeding corruption. Corruption is one of the factors for ineffectiveness of organizational leaders. The causes of corruption, according to Abbasi (2011), are low salaries and remuneration, unsecure job tenure, poor accountability system and political interference.

Organizations are spearheaded by leaders. They must be qualified mentally, intellectually and physically to perform effectively, otherwise the whole purpose of the existence of the organization will be at stake (Ramnarayan & Kumar, 2001). Safdar (2012) has identified that due to social and political pressures, public sector organizations are being run by leaders who lack leadership skills. It is argued that lack of visionary leaders create problems in policy formulations and implementations (Mapetere, Mavhiki, Nyamwanza, Sikomwe & Mhonde, 2012). Lack of capacity of organizational executives is the greatest challenge for public sector organizations (Ali, 2006). There is need of consistent and continuous training and exposure to organizational executives (Wart, 2003). This is crucial for capacity building of leadership. However, there is lack of proper training and development opportunities to organizational leadership in public sector. It is argued that leaders of public sector are provided with limited training opportunities (Arulampalam, Wiji, Booth & Alison, 1998; Muhammad, 2007). Although various training programs are arranged in public sector organizations where executives of public sector participate

in, but the course content and curriculum of these programs is either irrelevant or outdated which does not help improve knowledge and skills. Siu and Glover (2001) identify that working environment in public sector organizations is conventional which does not allow leaders to apply the newly learnt skills and ideas in the real working atmosphere. This is not an ideal situation due to which organizational leaders cannot perform their role effectively. In such environment, the leaders feel resistance to adopt the necessary changes required for the development of organizational system.

Existing evidence indicates that organizational leaders can be made effective by minimizing the barriers they are confronted with (Malasa, 2007). This required in-depth studies to know about the important aspects of barriers that are creating hurdles for organizational leaders (Avery, 2004). Although, researchers have carried out various studies to explore barriers to organizational leadership such as Malasa (2007) conducted a research study on barriers to leadership in education sector in Malaysia, McCarthy et al, (2011) conducted research on in Irish public sector and Siu and Glover (2012) explored barriers to leadership in Chinese public sector. There is lack of indigenous studies in Pakistan and especially in Khyber Pakhtukhwa that can come up with an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of barriers inhibiting the effectiveness of leadership in public sector organizations. This study is an attempt to explore barriers impeding the effectiveness of leadership in public sector organizations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample: This study was carried in three public sector organizations such as education, health and agriculture. Education, health and agriculture were purposively selected for this research study on the basis of its fundamental importance for provincial economy and social development. Evidence shows that education department has provided 55.50% of the total jobs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Govt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2013). Similarly, agriculture sector provides more than 20 percent contribution to provincial gross domestic product (GDP) and over 75 percent of livelihood depends upon it. Health sector also play crucial role in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for a prosperous economy and safe and healthy environment. (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa DHIS cell, 2010)[1]. A sample of thirty employees (n=30) was selected from selected government organizations.

Instrumentation

Interview: In order to obtain in-depth information from respondents, semi-structured interviews were used. It is considered as one of the

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[1] . The information has been taken from District health information cell (Khyber Pakhtunhkwa DHIS cell, 2010) available at: http// http://www.healthkp.gov.pk

flexible data collection tools where interviewees can discuss the phenomenon and its different aspects and dimensions. In this regard interviewees can describe their own experiences regarding phenomenon (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996, p.235). Thus, semi-structured interview is an effective tool for collecting in-depth information (Fontna & Frey, 2003).

Data transcription and Analysis: Data transcription was started after completing all the interviews. Transcription of data is an important step of qualitative data analysis. This gave the data a more organized form (Creswell, 2003; Denscombe, 2003) and brings the researchers close to the data (Creswell, 2003; Denscombe, 2003). After the interviews were transcribed, I started data analysis. Data analysis is the "process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and enable you to present what you have discovered" (Bodgan & Biklen 1998, p.157). According to Thorn (2000), there are many data analysis approaches in qualitative studies among which thematic analysis is the most appropriate. It is useful in transforming verbal data into some meaningful patterns. Keeping this in mind, I used thematic analysis for identifying the emerging patterns from the interview data.

Findings and Discussions

Leadership Crisis

Organizational executives during their interviews show their professionalism and competence towards their duties and responsibilities. However, perceptions of officers at middle level management were remained different regarding leadership effectiveness. According to lower and middle level offices, there is leadership crisis in public sector organization in KP. Organizational executives are lacking leadership qualities. They are not instrumental in performing their leadership role. Lack of leadership competency was when discussed with organizational executives; they failed to give good reasons for justifying their leadership oriented aspects. They discussed most of the managerial aspects of their jobs. This shows that organizational leaders in public sector in KP have assumed their role as managers. Leadership crises are due to various barriers which are discussed in the following section.

Barriers Inhibiting Leadership

Obligations of Cultural and Social Values

The perspective of respondents indicates that there is lack of leadership effectiveness in public sector organizations. This is partly due to cultural and social values, confronting leadership in the public sector organizations in KP. This is similar to what a senior official said that we cannot refuse the existence of cultural and social values in which there

are obligations of friends, elders and relatives. As members of the society we are bound to have high regards for them (Deputy Secretary Education, Peshawar, personal communication, Jan, 2014).

Due to collectivist culture and social values, people tend to use personal access and approaches for perusing their personal benefits regardless of the fact that their access and approaches violate merit. This leads to nepotism and favoritism which is a critical problem in public sector in KP. Due to this, government officers incline towards friends, elders, family and clan. But at the same time leaders' obligation towards organization is of fundamental importance. This is somewhat similar to the words of an official:

> The challenge for me as an officer is to maintain balance between goals and objectives of my organizations and the obligations of the community. As an officer I have to take decisions but sometime these decisions are not in the favor of an individual or group. This challenges me professionally and physically and suffers my role as a leader. (Additional Secretary Education, Peshawar, personal communication Jan, 2014)

However, there is Pakhtunwali in KP where it means "relationship" sacrifice and care for others. Due to which, it is not easy to strike a balance between the interest of families, friends and elders and that of organization. It is argued that effective leaders develop a balance between goals and objectives of the organizations and the obligations of their family, parents and clan (Boris-Schacter, 2006). However, due to culture and social obligations, public sector decisions are based on loyalties to a particular group; friends, families and clan in public sector in KP (Arif and Farooq, 2011). Organizational executives are inclined towards their families, relatives and friends. This has undermined the role of organizational leadership.

Political interference

During discussion, respondents said that unnecessary political interference is significantly impeding the effectiveness of leadership in public sector. In the view of an official "leadership in the public sector organizations is under political influence in KP, and organizational leadership is to be seen within the context of the political system" (Deputy Secretary Education, Peshawar, Jan, 2014). This is similar as several officers articulated that continuous interaction of the organizational leaders with political leadership has significantly affected organizational leadership. The decisions of organizational leadership are directly influenced by directions and priorities of political leaders. According to Tanwir and Fennell (2010), politicization of the

bureaucracy is one of the key causes of the decline in the civil service systems. It was argued that politically motivated decisions in recruitment, promotion and dismissal are detrimental for job security (Tanwir & Fennell, 2010). Each political party, after assuming power posts its own people on key positions. In such situations, organizational leaders are posted on the basis of political affiliations rather than leadership expertise and skills. Political interference in postings and transfers has broken the bridge between reward and performance, individual merit is relinquished and the efficiency and productivity of the organization are demolished.

Respondents suggest there is need of coordination between political and organizational leadership. According to Forbes et al. (2004), coordination of political and organizational leadership facilitates several potential advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, many respondents consider coordination as one of the important factors for leadership effectiveness. However, there is lack of clarification in roles and responsibilities of political as well as organizational leadership in KP. This is somewhat similar as an official said that interaction of the political and organizational leader is confronting with lack of clarity in their role and responsibilities. These are dominant factors that have influenced the effectiveness of leadership in the public sector organizations in KP (Chief Planning Officer in Health Department, Peshawar, personal communication, Jan, 2014). There are ambiguities in role and responsibilities in political and organizational leadership. According to Hyden (1984), role confusion has undermined coordination in public sector in KP due to which policy makers consider that implementation is not the concern of the policy makers and implementers believe that policy making is not the responsibility of the implementers. There is a tradition that most often the plans are removed from the political agenda after the government change. This has limited the role of organizational leadership in public sector in KP.

Bureaucratic culture

According to respondents, civil servants in KP consider themselves as the members of elite governmental club. They have given this status by society. Due to this, they considered themselves supreme in the society. This gives them a sense of power and authority. According to an Agriculture Officer "Unreal expectations are developed from the positions of civil servants and they are encouraged to commands authority". The public perceptions of high status for the civil servants have affected their conducts and behavior. This has developed an attitude of power holder and authority, supremacy and achiever. This attitude of the civil servant has created gap of common people from civil servants. Due to which, bureaucracy is not effective in understanding the needs of the people. This is the similar as an official stated that there is a gap in

the needs and demands of the public and attitudes of the bureaucracy towards solving their issues, due to which the bureaucracy is ill equipped to meet the challenges in KP (District Education Officer, Peshawar, personal communication, Jan, 2014)

In bureaucratic culture, organizational leadership value rules, hierarchical coordination, formalization, centralization and standard procedures instead of personal relationship and sympathy. There is little concern of leadership for subordinates' motivation. This has created various issues in public sector such as lack of commitment of employees towards their duties and responsibilities. In this regard, organizational executives very rarely master their role in developing teamwork, explore new opportunities and develop long-term policies and strategies. This is somewhat similar as respondents at lower and middle management told me that public sector leadership in KP has adopted managerial rather than a leadership paradigm, and that the "routine" of their activities are primary barriers to the role of effective leadership. If our organizations are to progress to meet the current need of the society, these have to adopt a leadership style that is more participative one, where there is teamwork, motivation, commitment and future direction.

Lack of Proper Training and Development Opportunities

According to the perspective of the respondents, lack of training for leadership role is one of the main issues impeding the effectiveness of leadership in public sector organizations. They cited various examples of how their work is being inhibited by lack of training and development. Many of respondents showed their deep disappointment in case of no professional development and growth. Apart from leadership training, various respondents spoke of the current lack of support from their ministries and their respective organizations for their professional learning. In the words of an official:

> I am not sure about others but for me, there is lack of on-going professional learning for public sector leadership. Those who are on top position need to update themselves with the latest issues and developments in the organizations and management practices. However, there is lack of support from the respective ministries for training and development (Medical Superintendent, government hospital, Peshawar, personal communication, Jan, 2014).

According to respondents, organizational executives are lacking leadership skills in KP. They are not prepared for leadership role accordingly because there is lack of availability of sustainable training programs in public sector. The prevailing training programs are not up to the standards to prepare organizational executives for leadership role. Therefore, organizational leadership is not instrumental to use advanced management techniques and strategic planning. The leadership crisis can

be gauged from the inability of organizational executives to deliver growth and development in education, health and agriculture sector in KP. Trainings of organizational executives are crucial for important leadership role but currently these are not effective in public sector in KP. As a result, organizational leaders in KP are not playing their fundamental role effectively. Due to this, organizational executives seem unprepared for   organizational growth and development.

Lack of accountability and Corruption

There was strong consensus of the respondents that accountability is clearly missing in public sector in KP. In the overall culture of public sector in KP, there is tendency to protect, rather than to punish. Several respondents said that lack of proper accountability system is a factor that has adversely affected leadership. According to a senior official, "There is lack of willingness in organizational leadership to accept responsibility, neither have they admitted mistakes nor do they tend to improve performance. They defend all of their actions even they are indefensible" (Principal, Khyber Medical College, Peshawar, personal communication, Jan, 2014). Several officers said that there is lack of accountability of organizational executives. Due to this, officers do not deal with their subordinates in spite of their poor performance. A senior official told me that it is not easy to deal with poor performance as many forces such as civil and military bureaucracy, political and religious forces, biradri (clan), and ethnicity become against you in doing so (Deputy Secretary Education, personal communication, Jan, 2014). This has hampered accountability system in public sector. Another official stated, "Currently, there is lack of proper monitoring system with effective process and procedures that can allow officers to hold employees accountable in case of underperformance" (Director General Agriculture, personal communication, Peshawar, Jan, 2014). The same interviewee further said that there is a lack of real power with officers at all levels in order to monitor poor performance. This has limited the role of   organizational   leaders   to   hold   underperformers   accountable. Therefore, public sector executives they have lost their control on subordinates. This has limited the control of leaders on subordinates.

Due to lack of accountability, there is corruption in public sector. It is argued that corruption can be observed in many forms in public sector organizations. There is misuse of regulatory authority and abuse of discretionary powers as well as participative and institutionalized corruption (Safdar, 2012). Respondents stated that discretionary powers were constituted by British for safeguarding their colonial concerns during their rule on India. After India and Pakistan got independence, the same British rules were copied and implemented in public sector in India and Pakistan. In this regard the same rules are adopted in the public sector organizations in KP. This leads to various ambiguities in rules and

regulations that further created abuses of discretionary powers in public sector in KP. This is similar as an official disclosed:

> British were used discretionary powers in order to protect their colonial interests rather than public interest. When they left this region, these rules were adopted as such and have been very rarely reviewed and revised. There are abuses of discretionary powers that have raised corruption enormously (Deputy Secretary Agriculture, Peshawar, personal communication, Jan, 2014).

Organizational executives are when granted with discretionary powers and granted with inadequate remuneration. This mismatch leads to escalate corruption. This is similar as Special Secretary Education stated that, "salaries in the government jobs are far behind private sector. This has raised the tendency of the officers towards unfair means in order to squeeze more money out of the system for fulfilling their requirements". Several officers said that inadequate salaries and remuneration lead public sector executives to start corruption with the exception of certain honest officers. Organizational heads are provided with neither remuneration they expect nor do the required standard of living is available. Several officers quoted that these are major causes of corruption. According to Additional Secretary Agriculture:, "many public sector officers have joined private sector or they have adopted illegal ways to squeeze money from the system and fulfill their requirements". Corruption has negatively affected the role of organizational leadership because corruption is one of the main factors in enhancement of ineffectiveness of organizational executives.

Conclusion

The study aims at exploring barriers impeding the effectiveness of public sector organizational executives in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. After critical investigation, this study found that organizational leadership is in crisis due to lack of leadership qualities in organizational executives such as they are lacking relevant knowledge and expertise, inadequate leadership style, poor communication skills, and lack of leadership focus. This is due to various barriers and challenges such as cultural and social obligations, lack of training and development, undue political interference, bureaucratic culture, lack of accountability and corruption that have impeded the effectiveness of organizational leaders. Due to these barriers, organizational executives have failed to develop strategic focus, organizational vision and employees' motivation and commitment. It was further concluded that the barriers have damaged the leadership role which is no more instrumental for achieving organizational goal and objectives. Due to which, despite of many efforts to improve performance of public sector organizations, still there is lack of effectiveness due to which public sector organizations are confronted

with lack of effective coordination, poor governance, weak priority settings and weak service delivery.

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