

Municipal Employees' Perceptions Of Political Interference In Human Resource Management Practices: Evidence From The Free State Province In South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Service delivery in South Africa has of recent been marred with much criticism and citizens' dissatisfactions evidenced by protests across the country, especially in different municipal areas. While the South African central government recognizes the important supportive role of human resources management (HRM) in ensuring quality service delivery, the municipalities' human resource management seem not to be playing this important role. There are accusations of too much political interference in municipal human resource management activities in municipalities in the country. The objective of this study was to determine municipal employees' perceptions of political interference in human resource management practices within selected municipalities in South African. Using a sample of nine municipalities and 342 employees, results of the quantitative analysis of data collected using questionnaires showed that municipal employees perceived little or low levels of political interference in HRM practices. The results are discussed within the context of organisational justice theory and implications on issues such as application of appropriate ethics in HRM practices are suggested.

Keywords: Human Resource Management Practices; Political Interference; Service Delivery; Organisational Justice; Cadre Deployment

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa is one of the countries whose Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) makes it mandatory for all levels of government - local, provincial and national to ensure the provision of quality services to citizens (Dzansi and Dzansi 2010). However, a closer observation at the rate of service delivery protests bedevilling municipalities in the country today shows that the level of service delivery in the countries' municipalities is not satisfactorily meeting citizens' expectations. While a number of attempts have been made to understand the genesis of these protests (Managa, 2012; Allan and Heese, 2015), doing so from employees' perceptions of how external factors such as political interference are affecting human resource management practices is yet to be established. What we know is that literature is abound that shows that employees' perceptions of organisational settings or climate leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their jobs, which then leads to good or poor customer service (Clark, 2011). This situation is exacerbated under conditions where fairness in HRM decisions is regarded as being compromised by some forces outside the organisation. Given that service delivery protests across South Africa have led to many problems such as dealing with the destruction of both private and public property and the fact that the South Africa local government context is highly politicised (Natalini, 2010), finding out whether service delivery protests can be understood by determining whether municipal employees view HRM practices as politically influenced becomes a compelling research agenda worth investigating.

The study is one of several other studies attempting to understand the poor service delivery problem in municipalities across South Africa from different conceptualisations. The paper specifically assesses the extent to which political interference is perceived to be affecting HRM practices of municipalities in South Africa. Based on organisational justice theory, it is posited that the relationship between political interference in HRM practices of municipalities could help understand and explain the poor services being delivered by municipalities in South Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Political Context of HRM in South Africa's Municipalities

According to Senyucel (2009), effective HRM relies on the conditions within a particular organisational setting. Therefore, the political polarisation of municipalities in South Africa has the potential of negatively affecting the HRM contexts among can be viewed as a pre-cursor to unacceptable HRM practices, prompting the occurrence of behaviours such as nepotism and the 'cadre deployment' strategy (Mashala, 2012). Cadre deployment within South Africa's political spheres is referred to as the appointment of people belonging to a certain political party (usually the ruling party), in government departments, regardless of qualifications or experience. Opposition parties in South Africa, such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) are of the opinion that a number of municipalities are full of employees whose knowledge of local government issues is questionable because of being deployed on 'cadre' grounds (DA, 2012:1) The ruling party, the ANC is the one often accused of such deployments, to the extent that HRM practices in municipalities have suffered criticism daily – being accused of illegitimate and counterproductive (Ahmad, 2010:33). Commenting on the issue of cadre deployment, Kanyane (2012) bemoans how it is devoid of merit and promotes loyalty - the latter being regarded as not congruent with the provision of good public service. Similarly, Areff (2012a) concurs when he notes that the deployment of incompetent people in South African municipalities based on the political polarisation of municipalities does not augur well with the dictates of organisational prowess in delivering services efficiently and effectively.

Research evidence supports the above assertions. For example, the Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), (2009) provided evidence of posts being filled in some municipalities in the country on political grounds. Similarly, Paradza et al. (2010) reported on political inference among three provinces in the country, while Dzansi and Dzansi (2010) found that the employment of unqualified persons based on political party affiliation needed the attention of government as it appeared to have been so rampant in government departments. Within the government itself, there is widespread acknowledgement that the notion of HRM as a panacea for service delivery has not been realised (South African Local Government Association (SALGA), 2011). This revelation by SALGA enables one to come to the conclusion that the quality of HRM practices in municipalities, is compromised by some political interference.

With authors such as Kabene et al. (2006) positing that effective HRM has become crucial and critical to the achievement of individual and organisational goals and objectives, South African municipalities are challenged to create work place settings, that is, policies, and programmes that promote fair treatment of every employee regardless of political affiliation. Indeed, an environment where employees are all treated equally has ramifications for sustainable service delivery within South African municipalities.

2.2 An Overview of International Municipal HRM Issues

The notion of how HRM practices are carried out within a particular work context and likely to affect employees' perceptions is not peculiar to South Africa alone. For example, studies conducted in municipal environments in Malaysia by Gould-Williams and Mohamed (2010), United Kingdom by Gould-Williams (2007), United States of America (USA) by McDowell and Leavitt (2011) and in Tanzania by Mgonja and Tundui (2012) all reveal the quest for enhancement of service delivery through a competent, self-disciplined, and motivated workforce and through creating an environment for expressing such competencies. These studies all highlighted the need for autonomy from political forces by human resources managers in the public sector. In the United Kingdom (UK), Gould-Williams (2007) found that when national political factors are used in HRM practices, public sector employees feel

subjected to unfair treatment at work, and they are more likely to leave. Similarly, in Tanzania, Mgonja and Tundui (2012) found that lack of qualified and well-trained human capacity and failure by the Local Government Authorities (LGAs) to attract and retain competent employees due to politics led to poor service delivery. A study done in four sub-Saharan African countries (Tessema, et al., 2012) to investigate HRM challenges and practices showed that the political and economic environments within which public servants were managed has not been conducive in maximizing individual and organizational performance. With such evidence, it is prudent that municipalities in South Africa guard against unfair and unjust human HRM practices to yield positive employee attitudes, commitment and the overall performance of their organisations. This could be achieved through proper and just employment of HRM practices. Bakhshi et al. (2009) concur that research on organisation justice has shown that organisational justice perceptions strongly affect the attitude of the workers such as job satisfaction, turnover intentions, commitment and workplace behaviour such as absenteeism and organisational citizenship behaviour.

2.3 Theoretical Framework – Employee Justice Perceptions

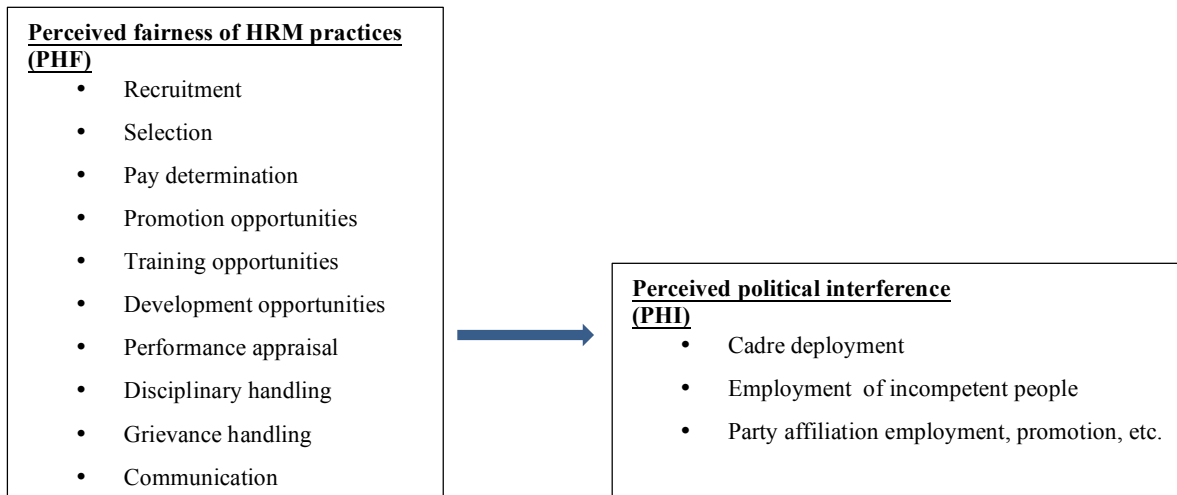
The study was guided by the organisational justice theory (Eib, 2015). The concept of justice perceptions has received much attention lately (Colquitt, 2001; Bakhshi et al., 2009; Thurston & McNallnm, 2011). Organisational justice is essentially the perception of fairness and the reaction to those perceptions in the organisational context (Greenberg, 1987). Organisational justice regards how employees' judge the behaviour of the organisation towards them and the resultant reactions (attitudes and behaviours) to such perceptions (Diner, 2014). This means that organisational justice plays a crucial role in terms of justice and fairness within organisations. Within the context of municipalities in South Africa, there is no doubt that employees' perceptions of how fair or unfair HRM practices are done can be linked to political interference. For example, suspicions of employment, promotions, pay rise, or development opportunities based on 'cadre deployment' is most likely to be perceived by employees as unfair. What this entails is that, municipal employees who perceive injustice and unfairness in HRM practices will be dissatisfied and demotivated to meet the ultimate goal of the organisation which, in South Africa, is delivering quality services to their respective customers. Pourzezat and Someh (2009) added by indicating that observation of injustice is one of the most important indexes influencing personnel to attribute such injustice to some observable events or situation within their work environment which they feel they do not have control over (external locus of control), in this case political interference. It is thus fair to contend that political interference can lead to perceptions of unfair HRM practices within South African municipalities.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Evidence of perceptions of unfair HRM practices by employees as a result of perception of political interference has been found in many studies (Burke, Noblet, & Cooper, 2013). In our literature review above, we have indicated some evidence that point to the fact that cadre deployment based on political polarisation has detrimental effects real or imagined perceptions of HRM practices being done unfairly. These real or imagined unfair HRM practices perceptions seem to be a reality within the South Africa municipal context as reports of jobs for friends, undeserving promotions based on political affiliations and not on peoples' competencies have been reported (Kanyane, et al., 2000). Thus, basing our argument on the tenets of organisational justice theory (Eib, 2015) and several researchers who provided evidence on the effects of a work setting or organisational climate on employee behaviours (Yener, Yaldiran, & Ergun, 2012; Kanten & Ülker, 2013), we propose that municipal employees who perceive some political meddling in organisational activities are likely to perceive HRM practices as being unfairly done. In other words, employee justice perceptions of HRM can be a function of perceived political interference.

Based on these explanations, a conceptual framework was developed as shown in Figure 1 to illustrate the hypothesised relationships between employees' perceptions of fairness in HRM (PHF) and perceived political interference (PHI).

Figure 1. The conceptual framework



2.5 Objectives and Hypothesis

Based on the above conceptual framework, the objectives of the study were: it is hypothesised that: H_0 – employees’ perceptions of fairness in HRM practices of municipalities will be positively correlated with their perceived political interference in the HRM practices (PHI); H_a – employees’ perceptions of fairness in HRM practices of municipalities will not be positively correlated with their perceived political interference in the HRM practices (PHI); where H_0 and H_a represent the null and alternative hypotheses, respectively.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was based on the empirical deductive reasoning, or positivism, a philosophical approach to research which emphasises the universality of knowledge obtained through objective and unbiased means (Kumar, 2011) by testing hypotheses and proving or disproving them (Bell, et al., 2014). Consistent with positivist tenets, the study adopted quantitative research approach, using figures to interpret employees’ perceptions of political interference in HRM practices.

3.1 Design

Because the research was premised on the positivist paradigm, and collection of quantitative data, a descriptive cross-sectional design to collect data at a point in time was adopted and associations between variables was established.

3.2 Target Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of all the 20 municipalities in the Free State province of South Africa and these are divided into four District municipalities, namely: Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Thabo Mofutsanyana and Xhariep and the Metropolis of Mangaung. These respondents were drawn from a sample of 9 simple randomly selected municipalities from the 20 municipalities in the Free State province. The unit of analysis was each individual municipality. Sample size in quantitative research for a small population is approximately 30% of the population (Wagner et al., 2012). Researchers (Ary, et al., 2014) advocate for, sample representivity, and not necessarily its size. Thus, sample size determination can be a result of an ‘educated choice’. Due to financial and time constraints, nine randomly selected out of the population of 20 municipalities were chosen. The number of questionnaires was restricted to 540, with 60 employees targeted from each municipality. To ensure a high response rate, field workers were trained in data collection techniques and were allocated a few respondents from municipal employees. Out of

the 540 questionnaires sent out to municipal employees, only 342 completed questionnaires were returned yielding 61.9% response rate.

3.3 Sample Characteristics

The sample of employees was fairly balanced between males (44.4%) and females (55.6%). All the employees who participated had at least post school certificate. Most (77.2%) of the employees held non-managerial positions; 10.1% held managerial positions, while 12.7% did not reveal their positions.

3.4 Data Collection

Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents after a pilot study with experts in human resource management indicated that the questionnaire had no ambiguous items. The questionnaires were translated into different languages spoken by the different in each municipal area. According to the Census Statistics of South Africa (2011:14), these three languages are the dominant languages in the Free State Province, Afrikaans, English, and Sesotho. Employees who were literate enough filled in the questionnaire on their own while those who were illiterate were helped by research assistants to fill the questionnaires. The Likert scale format was used to develop the questionnaires. After obtaining permission from the municipal manager in each municipal area under study, the questionnaire was randomly distributed among municipal employees from various levels of management, as well as non-managerial employees who dealt with customers on a daily basis. They were asked to answer Likert-scale questions on the degree of perceived fairness/justice in HRM practices and perceived political interference in HRM practices. The purpose of the study was explained to each respondent and participation was voluntary.

3.5 Data Analysis

Inferential statistics, including Chi square tests, were used to verify the hypothesis. Because analysis of data collected by means of Likert-type questionnaires often attracts attention, it is considered important to explain the procedure followed in the data analysis. Firstly, by using Likert-type questions, critics could argue that it produced an ordinal scale, which limits the analysis to the use of non-parametric statistical techniques. To satisfy critics, the initial data were transformed into scalar measures as recommended by Vyas and Kumaranayake (2006), Allen and Seaman (2007), and Boone and Boone (2012), to name just a few. Each section in the questionnaire contained a number of questions, which enabled the creation of indices, thus ultimately enabling parametric analysis (Vyas & Kumaranayak 2006; Allen & Seaman 2007; Boone & Boone 2012). Principal component analysis is a statistical technique used to reduce the number of variables in a data set by creating indices (dimension reduction) to represent such data (Vyas & Kumaranayake 2006; Boone & Boone 2012). A set of, say, k-variables (or questionnaire items) is combined into a few indices, and such indices are usually arranged in order of importance, by considering their contribution to the total variability of the data (Vyas & Kumaranayake 2006). For example, the questionnaire items that dealt with HRM practices were divided into six sections, namely (1) compensation, (2) performance appraisal, (3) disciplinary and grievance procedures, (4) recruitment and selection, (5) training and development, and (6) promotion, with a number of Likert-type questions asked in each section. Each of these sections was assessed in terms of distributive, procedural and interactive justice, with several questions posed for each type of justice. Indices were created for perceived political influence in HRM practices. The most important index, or the first principal component was considered as an adequate representative of a set of questionnaire items. It is important to also point out that on the five-point Likert scale a mean below 3 (the median point) suggests that the overall sentiment was negative, and scores above 3 is indicative of a positive sentiment. This was the decision criterion used to reach conclusions about the hypothesis. Spearman correlations were done to determine the hypothesised relationship. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the scale items for each index created. The scale items showed excellent internal consistency, as most of the alpha values were above 0.9 as indicated in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Questionnaire reliability test results

Questionnaire Index	Reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha)
Compensation -distributive	0.92
Compensation -procedural	0.94
Compensation - interactional	0.94
Performance appraisal- distributive	0.90
Performance appraisal- procedural	0.95
Performance appraisal- interactional	0.91
Disciplinary/grievances- distributive	0.84
Disciplinary/grievances- procedural	0.90
Disciplinary/grievances -interactional	0.72
Recruitment and selection - distributive	0.92
Recruitment and selection - procedural	0.86
Recruitment and selection - interactional	0.86
Training and development- distributive	0.93
Training and development - procedural	0.94
Training and development - interactional	0.92
Promotion- distributive	0.95
Promotion - procedural	0.90
Promotion - interactional	0.96
Political interference – recruitment and selection	0.94
Political interference- training and development	0.89
Political interference n- disciplinary/grievance handling	0.90
Political Influence-Compensation	0.94
Political Influence-Performance Appraisal	0.90
Political Influence-Promotion Opportunities	0.91

4. RESULTS

Table 2. Perceptions of fairness in HRM practices

HRM Practice	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Compensation					
Compensation Distribute	288	1.00	5.00	2.485	0.967
Compensation Procedural	305	1.00	5.00	2.475	0.936
Compensation Interactive	335	1.00	5.00	2.486	1.026
Performance Appraisal					
Performance Appraisal Distributive	325	1.00	5.00	2.455	1.126
Performance Appraisal Procedural	308	1.00	5.00	2.457	0.940
Performance Appraisal Interactive	320	1.00	5.00	2.691	0.967
Disciplinary & Grievances Handling					
Disciplinary/Grievances Distributive	323	1.00	5.00	2.766	1.033
Disciplinary/Grievances Procedural	301	1.00	5.00	2.910	0.892
Disciplinary/Grievances Interactive	326	1.00	5.00	2.966	0.979
Recruitment and Selection					
Recruitment and Selection Distributive	322	1.00	5.00	2.846	1.063
Recruitment and Selection Procedural	333	1.00	5.00	2.857	1.075
Recruitment and Selection Interactive	339	1.00	5.00	3.025	1.102
Training and Development					
Training and Development Distributive	327	1.00	5.00	2.620	1.157
Training and Development Procedural	325	1.00	5.00	2.643	1.065
Training and Development Interactive	330	1.00	5.00	3.017	1.028
Promotion					
Promotion Distributive	334	1.00	5.00	2.349	1.109
Promotion Procedural	323	1.00	5.00	2.447	1.091
Promotion Interactive	334	1.00	5.00	2.514	1.037
Overall HRP	201	1.00	4.95	2.682	0.847

In respect of HRM practices, the summaries for HRM practices indices presented in Table 2 shows that the average responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) with means that are generally below 3 with the overall mean being 2.682. Based on the decision criteria above, it is clear from the overall mean of 2.682 and the means for the various sections that generally, the respondents were not pleased with HRM practices. This finding corroborates the unfortunate finding by CoGTA (2009:67) that in political interference in recruitment of the workforce in some municipalities of South Africa, has led to unfair HRM practices. For instance CoGTA (2009:68) revealed salary and benefits disparities of municipal employees of similar ranks in South Africa. Such disparities are likely to invoke employee displeasure with HRM practices. According to Ferreira (2012:133), the intention of developing or reforming labour policy and for that matter HRM is ultimately to create a labour environment that is free from conflicts and conducive to constructive and harmonious labour relations. With municipal employees rating the quality of HRM so low, it is not surprising that squabbles have characterized South Africa’s municipal environment.

Literature confirms that practices such as promotion should be achieved only by those who can demonstrate, through competition with others, that they are the most suitable candidate for the position in question (Heathfield 201; Nel et al., 2011; Williamson & Williams, 2011). Unfortunately, this prognosis is not confirmed by the results of this study, and is also bad for organisational justice in municipalities in South Africa, as on an almost daily basis municipalities across the country have been accused of unsanctioned self-seeking and nepotism practices in all aspects of HRM (Dzansi & Dzansi 2010). With this state of affairs, it is not surprising that the same municipalities are unable to deliver service at the expected level of quality. From this position, one can safely conclude that the manner in which HRM practices are carried out has consequences for employees’ justness perceptions of their municipalities, and that employees’ justness perceptions of HRM practices may be perceived within the context of some political interference.

Table 3. Perceived political interference in HRM practices

PPI	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean Political Interference-Recruitment and Selection	333	1.00	5.00	3.35	1.131
Political Influence-Compensation	333	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.168
Political Influence-Promotion Opportunities	335	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.306
Political Interference-Training and Development	330	1.00	5.00	3.23	1.160
Political Influence-Performance Appraisal	332	1.00	5.00	2.88	1.184
Political Interference- Grievance and Disciplinary Handling	335	1.00	5.00	3.22	1.033
Overall PPI				3.14	

With regard to perceived political interference (PPI), Table 3 indicates that there was an almost overall balance between negative and positive sentiment about political interference as indicated by the mean scores which are close to the median score of 3. The item with the lowest score as far as political interference is concerned is in performance appraisal (mean=2.88). This indicates that generally political interference is low in performance appraisal. However, it is interesting to note that respondents had the highest average score for political interference in recruitment and selection (mean=3.35). This indicates politically connected people securing employment with the local municipalities. This finding is consistent with many other research results. For example as earlier studies including Mashala (2012), Democratic Alliance (DA) (2012), Paradza et al., (2010) and CoGTA (2009:67) found evidence of political interference in employee recruitment in municipalities across South Africa. Recruitment malpractices specifically mentioned that can be linked to political interference include: nepotism, favouritism, erratic appointments, promotions, posts being filled without advertisement in municipalities, “jobs for pals” based on political affiliation, as well as the openly admitted to so called “cadre deployment”. The problem with cadre deployment, according to Kanyane (2012), is that it is a deployment strategy that systematically places loyalty ahead of merit and competence, and it is therefore a serious obstacle to efficient public service. Areff (2012a) pointed out that incompetent and unqualified people are unable to deliver services efficiently and effectively. Areff (2012a) further stated that competence and ethical standards are critical for effective public service.

With regard to Areff’s (2012a, 2012b) and Kanyane’s (2012) statements, one can assume that while cadre deployment is viewed by some as a means of redressing inequity, it is also seen as abused by HRM officials in public service when making employment decisions, in that it is used in such a way that party affiliates are favoured,

without due consideration to organisational performance. In fact, allegations abound in the South African press, claiming that some, if not most, employees of municipalities owe their employment, promotion, remuneration, and development opportunities to party affiliation, rather than merit – claims that Paradza et al. (2010:40) have substantiated in their assessment of the role of councillors in service delivery at local government level in South Africa.

Even if some or most of these allegations were to remain unsubstantiated, it could be argued that suspicions alone could impact negatively on employees and the organisation. It is a fact that employee perceptions of organisational politics have been linked to a variety of negative outcomes for organisations, including low levels of employee citizenship behaviour (ECB), task performance, employee organisational commitment (EOC), and job satisfaction (Ahmad, Wasay & Malik 2012). For example, when it is suspected that a person is employed, promoted, given a pay increase, or given the opportunity to develop, on the basis of some party affiliation or certain ‘connections’ other than merit, this could be perceived by other employees as unfair. This perception could impact negatively on, for example, employees’ motivation, commitment and citizenship behaviour, which could eventually affect the quality of service delivered by the municipalities in which the employees work. This study confirms these earlier research results that political expediency, especially in recruitment and selection of employees, is a major force impacting on how HRM is practiced in South African municipalities

Table 4. Correlations between perceived political interference and HRM justice perceptions

Political Influences	Spearman's	Perception of HR fairness									
		Compensation - Distributive	Compensation - Procedural	Compensation - Interactional	Performance appraisal - Distributive	Performance appraisal - Procedural	Performance Appraisal - Interactional	Disciplinary and Grievances- Distributive	Disciplinary and Grievances- Procedural	Disciplinary and Grievances- Interactive	Recruitment and Selection - Distributive
PPI-Recruitment/ Selection	Correlation p-value	.311** .000	.225** .000	.211** .000	.235** .000	.283** .000	.340** .000	.258** .000	.199** .001	.283** .000	.216** .000
PPI -compensation	Correlation p-value	.362** .000	.240** .000	.195** .000	.271** .000	.304** .000	.398** .000	.279** .000	.178** .002	.262** .000	.156** .006
PPI-promotion opportunities	Correlation p-value	.384** .000	.279** .000	.238** .000	.303** .000	.327** .000	.439** .000	.279** .000	.146* .012	.200** .000	.154** .006
PPI - T&D	Correlation p-value	.371** .000	.247** .000	.180** .001	.265** .000	.308** .000	.380** .000	.262** .000	.149* .012	.207** .000	.163** .004
PPI-performance appraisal	Correlation p-value	.411** .000	.337** .000	.300** .000	.378** .000	.419** .000	.458** .000	.301** .000	.210** .000	.252** .000	.259** .000
PPI-Grievance/ Disciplinary Handling	Correlation p-value	.299** .000	.261** .000	.257** .000	.267** .000	.307** .000	.366** .000	.370** .000	.392** .000	.397** .000	.328** .000

(Table 4 continued)

Political Influences	Spearman's	Perception of HR fairness								
		Recruitment and Selection - Distributinal	Recruitment and Selection - Procedural	Recruitment and Selection - Interactional	Training and Development - Distributive	Training and Development - Procedural	Training and Development - Interactional	Promotion - Distributive	Promotion - Procedural	Promotion - Interactional
PPI-Recruitment/ Selection	Correlation p-value	.216** .000	.188** .001	.162** .003	.199** .000	.233** .000	.211** .000	.205** .000	.265** .000	.296** .000
PPI -compensation	Correlation p-value	.156** .006	.101 .071	.068 .220	.133* .019	.230** .000	.200** .000	.194** .000	.257** .000	.300** .000
PPI-promotion opportunities	Correlation p-value	.154** .006	.131* .019	.090 .105	.203** .000	.276** .000	.223** .000	.252** .000	.323** .000	.378** .000
PPI - T&D	Correlation p-value	.163** .004	.142* .011	.080 .150	.252** .000	.311** .000	.248** .000	.225** .000	.270** .000	.298** .000
PPI-performance appraisal	Correlation p-value	.259** .000	.189** .001	.184** .001	.252** .000	.318** .000	.210** .000	.308** .000	.390** .000	.381** .000
PPI-Grievance/ Disciplinary Handling	Correlation p-value	.328** .000	.286** .000	.316** .000	.259** .000	.303** .000	.303** .000	.267** .000	.306** .000	.316** .000

Table 4: Correlations between perceived political interference and HRM justice perceptions. The prime purpose of this section is to assess if political interference affects the general sentiments of employees about fairness of HRM practices. To test his research hypothesis, the correlations for the various items under political interference and HRM practices are analysed and these are presented in Table 4. The results show that political interference, in most aspects of it, is positively associated with perception of HR fairness (*p*-values for correlations mostly equal to zero or very small). From purely research point of view, this is a surprising result as the positive correlations seem to suggest that higher levels of political interference are associated with positive perception of HRM fairness. However, from a pragmatic point of view, this result can be explained. The point is that probably the employees are not bothered by political interference as they might as well have been employed in the municipalities through political connections. In fact, it is quite conceivable that most of the respondents would be sympathisers of the ruling party in the municipalities studied so and these were the marginalised people of the past. So, what may seem fair HRM practice to such employees would obviously be the (subjective) one that favoured them getting jobs and not necessarily what would normally (objectively) be regarded as fair HRM practice.

The only non-significant correlations were between PPI on compensation versus recruitment and selection–procedural ($r=0.101$, $p\text{-value}=0.07$), PPI on compensation versus recruitment and selection–interactional ($r=0.068$, $p\text{-value}=0.220$) and PPI on promotion opportunities versus recruitment and selection–interactional ($r=0.090$, $p\text{-value}=0.105$). Although these correlations are significant they have very small effect size (most are below $r=0.300$).

5. CONCLUSION

Using Pearson correlations to make inferences out of the hypothesised relationships, the study concluded that the null hypothesis which states that perceived fairness of HRM practices (PHF) will be negatively related to perceived political interference (PPI) in HRM practices is not supported. The alternative hypothesis that perceived fairness of HRM practices (PHF) will not be negatively related to perceived political interference (PPI) in HRM practices is therefore accepted.

Though the finding is contrary to conventional wisdom, it is concluded that in a politically polarised organisation like municipalities in South Africa where employees are very likely to a large extent owe their employment to

political interference rather than competence, one cannot rely on employee reported fairness of HRM practices to predict the extent of political interference in those practices.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations for Practice and Policy

Although the results of the study reported otherwise than hypothesised, it is recommended that the current trends such as cadre redeployment (no matter how much defended), nepotism and discrimination in promotion are untenable for HRM fairness. Municipalities are therefore advised to fully take into consideration the detrimental effects of such practices on issues such as, for example, service delivery to the public. The introduction of ethics training programmes municipal managers, could help to elicit the honesty and self-discipline that has been so lacking in South African municipalities when it comes to recruitment and selection of employees. South African municipalities could learn from the Malaysian experience where values that emphasise honesty and self-discipline have been embedded in HRM practices in Malaysian public service, including municipalities, with encouraging results. It is recommended that HRM officials in municipalities put aside their political differences so that they can work as a team in managing HRM fairly without expediency to any political affiliation. South African municipalities could learn a lot from the USA example where McDowell and Leavitt (2011) reported that many local governments have at least three groups or organisational units that share HRM functions and responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, working together as a team led to successful resolution of seemingly unsolvable HR issues. Lastly, it is evident from the literature examined in this study that for organisations to succeed, the right people must be employed. It is recommended that human resource management in South African municipalities rise above personal and political interests by employing the right people with the right skills and capabilities.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This research could have different results if conducted, probably, on a larger-scale to involve all provinces in the country. The positive relationship noted in the study could be further verified /validated by involving political party representatives in each municipality. That is, there is need to verify contradictions in the PHF versus PPI relationship as the current study yielded results contradictory to organisational justice theory.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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