Organizational Politics in Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices: A Phenomenological Study

Qamaruddin Maitlo[1*], Sajjad Ali Shaikh[2], Abid Mahmood Muhammad[3], Muhammad Osaid Rabie[4], Naveed Anwer[5]

[1*]Department of Business Administration, Sukkur IBA University Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan
[2]Department of Business Administration, Sukkur IBA University Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan
[3]Department of Business Administration, Sukkur IBA University Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan
[4]Lahore Business School, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan
[5]Lahore Business School, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the perception of organizational politics (OP) within public sector higher education institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan. The study's primary objective is to investigate the implications of OP in HRM processes including selection, evaluation, and promotion criteria. It is anticipated that the study findings will provide possible alternative recommendations on how to mitigate the negative influence of this phenomenon. Considering the qualitative nature of the study, transcendental phenomenology is chosen as the research method for this study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection by adopting a purposive sampling technique. The data was analyzed using atlasti software. Out of six identified themes, three were selected for detailed analysis. The study findings revealed the significant involvement of OP in HRM practices within Pakistani HEIs, emphasizing the need for effective strategies to address this critical issue.

Keywords: Organizational Politics, HRM, Higher Education Institutions, Social Exchange Theory

Introduction

Universities play an essential role in the expansion and advancement of many facets (Haleem et al., 2024; Khan & Hussain, 2022). In addition, the significant role of organizational politics in public-sector universities has been highlighted by various studies. Organizational politics generally refers to the actions taken by individuals to further their interests while ignoring the well-being of their colleagues or their organizations. Since individuals seek to satisfy their demands or accomplish their goals regardless of the consequences, politics are more likely to arise in academic institutions where people come from diverse backgrounds. Several recent research studies indicate that organizational politics adversely affect employees' perceptions, leading to outcomes such as increased intention to leave, job dissatisfaction, and burnout (Nazir et al., 2024). Haleem et al. (2024) explored how teachers' intentions to leave their jobs in private educational institutions are influenced by their perceptions of OP. Khan and Hussain (2022) ascertain those Pakistani educational institutions are politically oriented due to increased competitiveness.

Employees are an essential asset of an organization, and fairness in reward, selection, recruitment, performance evaluation, and promotion is a fundamental motivation for them (Veloso et al., 2021). Accordingly, the SET presumes that a conflict of interest will arise in the connection between employees and the organization if they are not compensated for the value they provide to the organization (Stafford & Kuiper, 2021). Moreover, according to Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2019), university employees frequently engage with politics in a variety of settings. Though, OP creates a stressful working environment for employees; it drains their energy and impedes their ability to achieve their goals, requiring them to spend additional resources to cope with the stress (Murtaza et al., 2024). In addition, Abun et al. (2022) claim that organizational politics involve informal, unofficial, and behind-the-scenes efforts to pursue personal goals. On the other hand, Nyathi (2024) and Fuenzalida & Riccucci (2019) argue that, in the context of HRM, organizational politics involves inequalities in human resource practices such as employee selection, evaluation, and promotion.

It is commonly believed that organizations cannot exist without politics, and people who practice them are concerned with politics, power, and influence. In particular, when people believe their coworkers acquire resources and assistance through unfair means, the workplace atmosphere is viewed as political and stressful (Nazir et al., 2024). Resultantly, politics of management and the management of politics in the workplace have garnered a lot of interest because of their perceived pervasiveness, mystique, and potential benefits, which are associated with those who are skilled at using politics in a fight over resources (Hafeez et al., 2020). The practical understanding and the impact of organizational politics in HRM practices have been marginally explored (Fuenzalida & Riccucci, 2019). Therefore, organizational politics in HRM activities needs enhanced academic investigation and practical comprehension. Hence, the purpose of this study is to comprehend the phenomena of OP in the HEIs sector of Pakistan, determine whether it influences decision-making in human resource management practices, and offer possible alternative strategies to address OP in this sector (Rehman et al., 2021).

There are limited studies in the literature that examine the organizational politics (OP) in human resources management practices, particularly concerning the hiring, promotion, and evaluation of employees at Pakistani higher education institutions. Therefore, this study bridges these research gaps and significantly contributes to both academic and professional discourse. To begin with, it provides empirical evidence of conceptualization and understanding of OP. Secondly, this study examines the relationships between OP and HRM Practices. Lastly, it offers practical recommendations for effectively managing organizational politics within higher education institutions in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Studies conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s (Mayes & Allen, 1977; Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981; Mintzberg, 1983) established the theoretical foundation for the phenomenon of organizational politics. According to Fuenzalida and Riccucci (2019), politicization is a serious issue in developed and underdeveloped countries. Their findings confirm the negative effect of politicization on public sector performance, which further mediates the impact through HRM practices. Furthermore, they assert that politicization affects organizational performance and HRM practices as well as other areas. According to Atshan et al. (2022), the term organizational politics (OP) describes actions made inside a company to fulfill personal goals. OP includes a wide range of definitions, which implies that the field is evolving and that there is ongoing discussion in the literature. According to Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2019), OP is the use of power, sway, and tactics to advance one's objectives while impeding the productive contributions of others inside the organization. Employees mainly use organizational politics as a tool to influence others. Workplace politics refers to people's methods of gaining control over others and influencing actions and important decisions (Dhar, 2011). The study indicates that OP may introduce a major bias into HRM operations, thereby harming the selection, assessment, and promotion procedures (Ferris and King, 1991). As interest in organizational politics has increased, so too has the variety of methods employed to study it (Vigoda, 2003).

Yadav et al. (2022) showed a negative link between workplace spirituality, empathy, and employees' well-being about OP in their quantitative study of police personnel in police departments in Uttar Pradesh, India. Similarly, the study of Murtaza et al., (2024) revealed that OP harms job satisfaction. Subsequently, in their quantitative analysis of five-star hotels in Bangladesh, Al-Romeedy & Khairy (2024) explored a negative association between OP and HRM practices. They found that OP lessens the commitment and performance of the individuals at the workplace. Additionally, a study on organizational politics by Dello Russo et al. (2017) aimed to reduce the OP in performance appraisal among Italian employees in the public and private sectors. The study discovered that the notable increase in the average age of the industrialized workforce had a significant impact on human resource practices, such as performance management. Furthermore, they opine that organizational politics (OP) in performance appraisal is a phenomenon that has not been investigated in detail. It is likely to occur in performance appraisals because of its outcomes like promotion, pay raises, visibility, termination, and transfer. However, on the contrary, the study on public sector employees conducted by Park & Lee (2020), and Atshan et al. (2022) found that perceived organizational politics have a significant and beneficial impact on employees' job satisfaction.

According to Khan & Hussain (2022), OP does exist in Pakistani HEIs. In their quantitative study, they concluded that OP is a tool used by individuals in Pakistani HEIs to gain high popularity, misuse power, and disparage the reputations of other organization members. The study of Nazir et al., (2024) revealed that OP has a positive influence on hostility. The literature indicates that numerous studies have been conducted on OP in connection with various factors in academic and other sectors of Pakistan. A quantitative study by Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2019) in Pakistan's HEIs claims that turnover intention and OP are negatively correlated. On the same note, a quantitative study by Atta & Khan (2016) in Pakistani higher education institutions found a negative correlation between organizational civic activity and OP. The study of Haleem at al., (2024) conducted on teachers in Pakistani private institutions reveals that male teachers are more committed to OP than female teachers, while female teachers are more likely to intend to leave due to OP. Likewise, a quantitative study by Malik et al. (2018) in public sector universities in Pakistan asserted that OP has a negative correlation with employee creativity and a positive correlation with knowledge concealment. Nevertheless, a study by Nyathi (2024) explored that an organization may only have a positive impact of OP if it is regarded as such.

Organizational politics is a critical factor prevailing within Pakistan's public HEI sector (Haleem et al., 2024; Khan & Hussain, 2022). According to current research studies such as Murataza et al., (2024), (Rehman et al., 2020), Hochwarter et al. (2020), and Lam and Xu (2019), employees in Pakistan's HEIs participate in office politics and are given top-ranking jobs with out-of-turn promotions because of organizational politics. Studies by Khan & Hussain (2022) and Malik et al., (2019) reveal that workers refusing to be part of organizational politics frequently receive subpar performance reviews and are consequently unable to obtain timely promotions. A worthwhile study by Arefin et al. (2020) found that political ideology plays a significant role in Pakistani HEIs' hiring, selection, and promotion procedures. Moreover, numerous studies have revealed that organizational politics are a major issue at Pakistan's public sector universities (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019; Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010).

Other sectors of Pakistan are similarly affected by organizational politics (OP), as evidenced by Shahzad's (2020) quantitative research of the country's cement industry. According to his research, employees' intention to leave and the OP have a positive and significant relationship. Similarly, a study conducted by Ullah & Ahmad (2018) in the banking sector of Pakistan claimed that there is a significant relationship between job stress and OP and an insignificant relationship between OP and job satisfaction. They assert that it is frequently seen in organizations for workers to exert influence over coworkers, managers, or organization management for their own personal or unfair benefit.

Organizational Politics and HRM
The phenomena of organizational politics (OP) have a variety of connotations, and it is extremely difficult to declare with certainty that it always reflects undesirable or detrimental behavior. Like other motivation-based activities, political action is a natural human activity that serves both individual and communal goals. Referring to this concern, Khan, & Hussain (2022) claim that utilizing politics and force to increase productivity at work are indications of a person's ability to influence change and contribute to the environment. Similarly, according to Atta and Khan (2016), people who possess force, power, and influence can shape their environment to fit their needs, while those who do not make use of these resources nonetheless feel dissatisfied and undervalued. The assertion that organized politics has many advantageous elements is also supported by Atshan et al., (2022). They see it as an additional tool that employees of the firm might use to achieve a variety of goals.
Employee skills, attitudes, and behaviors all of which are impacted by HRM practices—have the biggest impact on organizational outcomes, according to multiple studies. In this context, organizational politics (OP) can lead to some significant benefits to organizations (Khairy, 2019). Accordingly, Khairy (2019) further asserts that human resource management practices (HRMPs) present organizations with real challenges, including hiring, training, and retaining a dedicated, capable, well-managed, and highly motivated workforce that is focused on providing a high-quality product to the ever-demanding and discriminating customer. Moreover, the connection between organizational politics and HRM practices can be used to pinpoint the underlying reasons why HRMPs are successful or unsuccessful and help hotels create plans to improve HRM practices, which could boost output, employee retention, quality, income, and the company's overall success. According to a study done in Chile's public sectors by Fuenzalida & Riccucci (2019), politicians who want to successfully implement their stated beliefs mainly use bureaucratic control mechanisms to make sure that political and personal loyalty are prioritized over merit-based standards at the highest levels of government (Cheema et al., 2013).

Theoretical Discussion
Social Exchange Theory
The theoretical framework of this study is based on Social Exchange Theory (SET). The Social Exchange Theory was developed by Homans (1958), which states that the relationship between two parties is established through cost-benefit analysis. Social exchange theory (SET) assumes that when employees are not valued against the value they render to an organization, then the relationship has a conflict of interest. These conflicts can manifest in various forms, such as not promoting deserving employees, giving low ranks to high performers, and not placing the appropriate personnel for open positions. According to Ahmed et al. (2023), the SET is one of the most reliable theories for analyzing workers' behavior in the workplace.

Methodology
Research Design
The one-time data was gathered through semi-structured interviews in the higher education sectors of Sukkur Division, Sindh, Pakistan, making the study qualitative in character, incorporating analysis and employing a deductive and cross-sectional methodology. Phenomenological research is applied to describe the meaning of individuals' lived experiences and concerned with uncovering the subjective experiences of individuals by expressing the essence of these experiences (Creswell, 2012). The transcendental phenomenology method was employed in this study because it is concerned with exploring and describing viewpoint of an individual's perspective (Moustakas, 1994).
The study participants consist of HR Professionals working in the HR departments of the public sector universities in the Sukkur region of upper Sindh. Similar to the thesis study of Saba (2015) which was conducted at Pakistani public sector HEIs, data was collected from HR representatives and the Registrar's Office due to their extensive experience in comprehending the processes through the supervision of HRM practices.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure
Instrument
Semi-structured interviews were used as the date collection tool. An expert from Sukkur IBA University's ORIC department research committee confirmed the interview guide's reliability, which is validated by the expert review process. Following the expert's evaluation, a revised interview guide (Appendix 2) was shared with the participants.

Procedure
The selection process, also known as intensity sampling, is a purposive sampling technique that is suitable for phenomenology since it enhances researchers' comprehension of the phenomenon (Raffanti, 2008).
The researcher restated the purpose of the study, and interview sessions were begun with greetings. The participants signed a consent form (Appendix 3) to participate in the research. So, to encourage in-depth discussion probing questions were developed and utilized. All the interviews were conducted at the participant's convenience, including their offices, public places, coffee shops, and residences. The interviews were conducted in two languages including English and Urdu, because Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and English is used as a medium of instruction in HEIs sectors of Pakistan. However, naturally, each interview lasts approximately 25 to 49 minutes maximum, and data collection was completed in 6 months. All the 17 employees working in the HR department of the universities of 3 higher education institutions were contacted and briefed about the topic and research, and interviews were scheduled as per their given time. In total 10 HR professionals working in the universities interviewed, which is within the recommended sample size range of five to 25 for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2012). We refer to these participants as core searchers (Moustakas, 1994) because the

essence of organizational politics was derived from the participants' lived experiences rather than from our interpretation of the phenomenon.

Data Analysis and Techniques
The thematic analysis (TA) method is used to analyze the data through Atlas.ti software. The reason behind using this is because this software program employs coding system that is structured around various topics and themes found in these files, and it uses a scheme of numbers and letters to identify key categories and subcategories.
All of the taped interviews, memoranda, and field notes were entered into computer files. Connections between categories and themes were made to further understanding of organizational politics in HRM practices for portrayal in the final document.

Analyses and Findings
The analysis and findings section provides an in-depth understanding of the concepts and findings from the collected data using Thematic Analyses approach. A total of 17 employees working in the HEI sectors were approached and screened for set inclusive criteria. One employee out of 17 did not meet the inclusion criteria, and two eligible participants declined to participate in the study. However, the researcher reached the saturation point during the 10th interview when no new information/concepts came from the participants. The characteristics of the participants can be seen in 'Table 1' below.

Descriptive Statistics
Frequency and percentage were used to analyze the respondents' demographic data using the descriptive statistics method. Ten middle-level to top-level employees working in the human resource departments of HEIs of Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan, were interviewed. The data was coded, analyzed and **"Table 1"** shows the details of respondents from Organization 1 (4, 40%) and Organization 2 (3, 30%), and organization 3 (3, 30%). The respondents age between (26 and 35, 50%), and most of the males were married (6, 60%, and 4, 40%). The qualification of the majority of the respondents was postgraduate (6, 60%).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=10)

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Organization Name	Organization 1	4	40.0
	Organization 2	3	30.0
	Organization 3	3	30.0
Designation	Manager	2	20.0
	Assistant Manager	1	10.0
	Assistant Registrar –HR	2	20.0
	HR Assistant	2	20.0
	Director HR	1	10.0
	Assistant Director HR	2	20.0
Gender	Male	6	60.0
	Female	4	40.0
Age	20-25	0	0.0
	26-30	2	20.0
	31-35	3	30.0
	36-40	3	30.0
	41-45	1	10.0
	46 and Above	1	10.0
Status	Single	4	40.0
	Married	6	60.0
Education	Matriculation	0	0.0
	Intermediate	0	0.0
	Graduate	4	40.0
	Postgraduate	6	60.0

Source: Authors generated

Word cloud view of the data
Word cloud is a visual representation of text data where the frequency of each word is depicted through varying font sizes. It can be used to analyze any type of text data, including essays, brief comments, and written opinions or survey responses (DePaolo, & Wilkinson, 2014). This study highlights the significant involvement of organizational politics in HRM practices including employee selection, evaluation, and promotion which is investigated through:
• The assessment of keywords in terms of Organizational Politics (OP)
• The assessment of keywords in selection practices of HRM
• The assessment of keywords in promotion practices of HRM
• The assessment of keywords in performance evaluation practices of HRM

By analyzing the results in word cloud view (Figures 1 below), the study was able to quickly and accurately establish a connection between organizational politics and HRM using key terms like "Organizational Politics," "Selection," "Evaluation,"

and "Promotion" while answering the questions, "What is organizational politics?" and "Does organizational politics affect the HRM practices?"

The frequent use of the terms "Selection" and "Promotion," as well as the phrases "Organizational Politics" and "Performance Evaluation," allowed the study to draw the conclusion that, taken as a whole, people seemed to understand the basic concept of organizational politics in HRM.

This analysis provides a quick glance for formative purposes but does not entirely replace a formal assessment of the number and percentage of respondents giving acceptable answers. Furthermore, the below-given word cloud view was generated from the transcripts developed through semi-structured interviews.

Figure 1 Word Cloud View

Source: Authors generated Themes

Themes are the basis for qualitative research. Hence this study is conducted based on themes analyzed and developed to achieve the objectives and answers to the research questions. The data is analyzed and six themes. However, the study focused on three themes relevant to the research questions and objectives, including organizational politics, organizational politics in HRM, and Strategies to lessen the effect of organizational politics in HRM, which are analyzed below:

Table 2: Themes Explored

Categories	Explored Themes
Organizational Politics	Collective Benefits
	Information used a tool
	Positive Politics
	Negative Politics
	Official Unions
	Exchange of Work Reciprocity
	Proactive Behavior of blaming
	Lobbying
Organizational Politics in HRM	Politically ranked high
	Politically ranked low
	Pressure for recruiting, promotion, or selection
	Reciprocity in selection
	Influence to recruit or promote
Strategies to lessen the OP:	Bring Objectivity
	Committee to reduce the pressure
	Develop policies

Develop KPI's
No loophole/ambiguity
No discrimination
No favoritism
Organizational Culture
Re-engineer the processes
Follow policies
Make goals and objectives

Source: Authors generated

Theme 1: How Organizational Politics is understood?
Although many scholars have defined organizational politics in the past, the most prominent are selected for this research. One of the comprehensive descriptions is given by Preffer (1992). He defines organizational politics as "actions conducted within organizations to acquire, develop, and employ power and other resources to achieve one's chosen results in circumstances when there is uncertainty or disagreement regarding options. In some other prominent studies, OP is generally described as behavior that serves to protect one's self-interest at the expense of another (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Ferris et al., 1989; Gotsis, & Kortezi, 2010; Allen et al., 1979). The key researchers involved in this research defined OP as the activities undertaken by individuals for personal gain, collective benefits, and lobbying purposes.

Respondent 3:
Organizational politics is something, you like the people, uh, people of the organizations involved in, uh, political activities for their benefit or can be a collective benefit. So, the political activities employees perform, is called for organizational politics.'
However, the findings of this study also indicate the existence of organizational politics in the higher education institutions of Pakistan. The widely used factors of organizational politics are: Reciprocity, Attacking / Blaming, Use of Information, Ingratiation, Forming powerful coalitions, and Association with influential people (Figure 2).
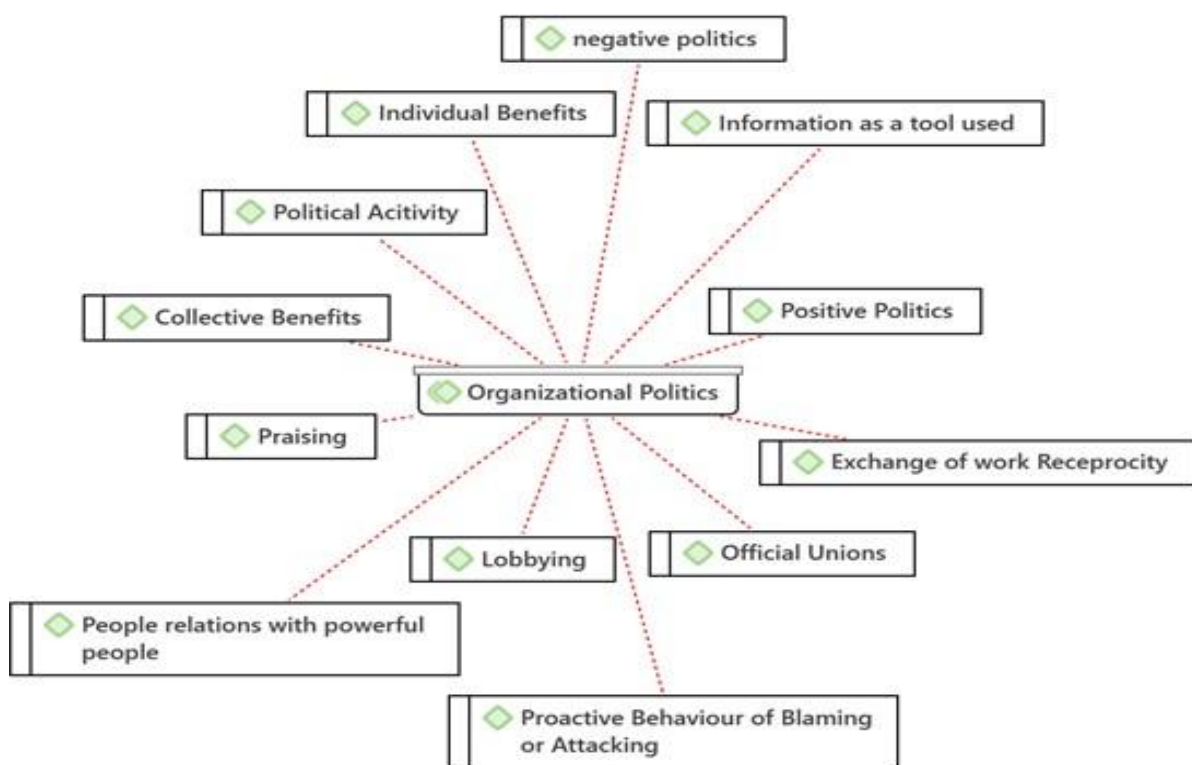

Figure 2: What is Organizational Politics?

Source: Authors generated

Theme 2: Organizational Politics in HRM Practices
According to Ferris and King (1991), numerous studies assert that the traditional operations of human resource system are correlated to the uncertainty in the process of matching a person with their job. The HRM system primarily handles this matching, which takes place during job analysis, performance evaluation, training, and promotions. When standards are clear and consistent, there is less chance of ambiguity arising and OP is less noticeable and detrimental to the human resources decision-making process. However, people with more power and influence may become more involved in the processes and influence them using unacceptable, sectorial, parochial, or personal factors when the criteria for hiring, promoting, or changing

a person's duties and responsibilities are unclear. Consequently, looking at the matter of issues in human resource functions, this study finds the involvement of organizational politics / political behaviors in the human resources functions including selection, evaluation, and promotion of employees as highlighted in respondents' responses.

Respondent 9:
Yes , there is politics in the selection of employees but for the lower positions because employees in the top positions are hired through the selection board.'

Respondent 1:
My boss called me into his office and he said that, I know your performance is better, but I have to give him a higher ranking. And I was like, why, what is this? If I have performed better, I should be ranked better. But, I couldn't do anything. And he was promoted, which was my right.'

Respondent 2:
'A promotion of the employees? If, someone is a favorite employee or we call, either I've shared my previous experience that was particularly about the promotion, so I faced exactly this phenomenon that employee was given a higher ranking based on the factor I cannot share. , he was promoted, he was given higher ranking so that he may, go through the promotion process and I was ranked lower than him'.

The ability (or tendency) of employees to engage in politics is a last issue that may impact HRM decisions. Studies have indicated that societal, environmental, and individual factors influence how willingly people use politics in organizations (Vigoda, 2006). Politics in the workplace is more likely to be used by some personality types. For instance, those with proactive tendencies, strong needs for power, high levels of competition, or success-driven motivation are more likely to be active in organizational politics.
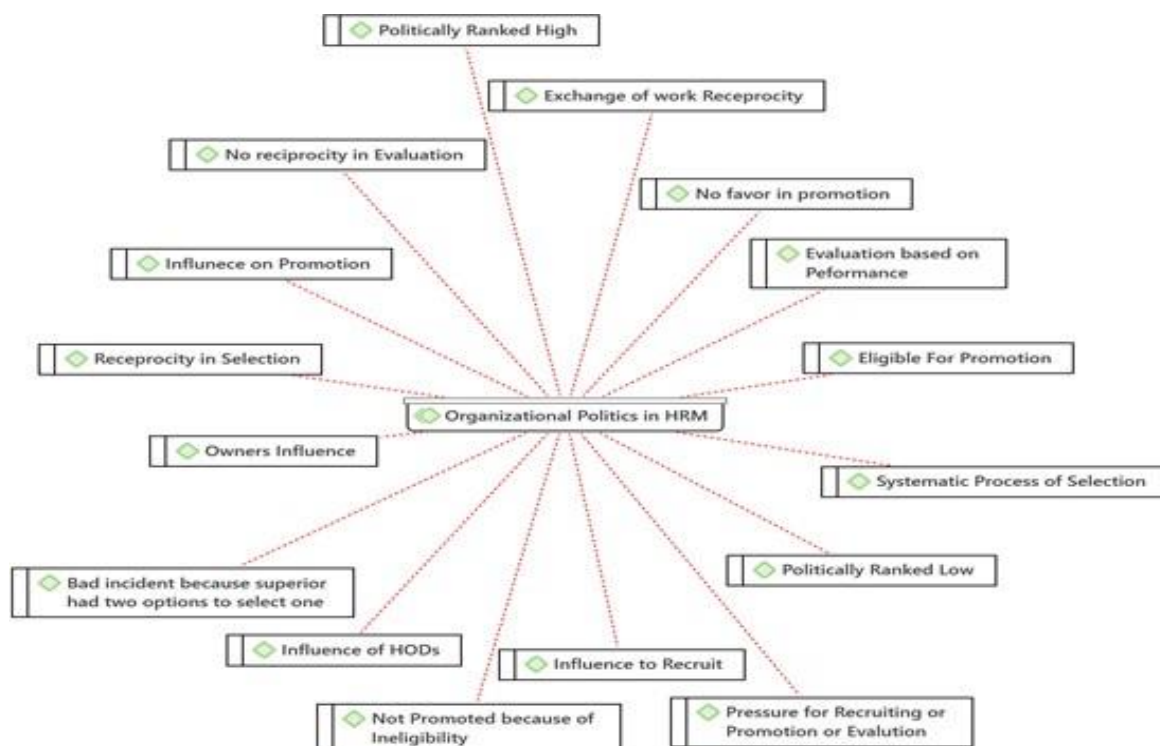

Figure 3: Organizational Politics in HRM

Source: Authors generated

Theme 3: Strategies to lessen the effect of OP
In addition to highlighting the organizational politics in higher education institutions, this study also sheds light on the techniques and solutions that the survey's participants have advocated to reduce organizational politics in higher education institutions. The following are the main strategies that the participants recommended, according to the findings:

Table 3. Findings/Strategies to lessen the effect of OP

Strategies	Procedure
Re-engineer the process	• Selection board/committee members consist of 50% externals and 50% internal members, and candidates are selected with mutual understanding. • Developing new KPIs, which are objective and per the Job descriptions of the employees, for the performance appraisal, as described below. • Setting individual goals and objectives as per JDs and Grade so that their particular performance can be appraised. • Set criteria for employees' interviews before the promotions. • Performance ratings/scores according to Seniority, education, Performance, and Committee Feedback.
Developing KPIs	• Most of the universities have been using the same indicators for many years without updates. From time to time, organizations and employees evolve. • Universities are using the same indicators for all employees so universities develop new KPIs according to their grades/JDs because all employee's Job descriptions are different as per their grades.
Make goals and objective	• Most of the universities are without goals and objectives for employees to achieve as per their job descriptions so the employees get the objectives as per their job descriptions. • The separate marks/points in the performance appraisal are used to achieve the objectives and, subsequently, for promotions.
Bring Objectivity	• Key performance indicators are not objective in nature because most universities use subjective performance indicators, such as "Do you have a complete understanding of the organization's mission and vision?" Asking this subjective type of question to employees working for 10 years does not give a sense of judging their ability/performance. As a result, diplomatically, all get increments, including low/high performers. • Measurement of Performance on the basis of objectives they achieve.
Loopholes/ambiguity	• Most of the universities have gaps in the KPIs, goals, and objectives, and timescale promotions like: • Using old KPIs from years • Goals and objectives are not according to their JDs, • Late promotions of employees.
Organization culture	• Employees work with the same pattern for years in terms of KPIs and objectives for the selection, evaluation, and promotion of employees. So this culture should be avoided to avoid politicking behavior at the workplace
No discrimination	• Universities give preference to native personnel. For example, in Sindh, candidates with Sindh domiciles and Sindhi are preferred. As a result of this discrimination, we lost talented candidates from other provinces.
No favoritism	• Employees should be appraised/promoted as per their goals and objectives because pointing out the favorite employees in the Annual Performance Report will create politicking behavior among the employees.
Developing Policies	• All strategies should be get documented after the approval of competent authorities (VCs)/Syndicates.

Source: Authors generated

Respondent 8:

'See, as long as I believe the HR is the organizational culture, they set the culture of the organization, whatever the decision they make, it is for the head of the department and the lowest rank employee. So, HR should make such policies and decisions to avoid politics and favoritism. If the HR is not diligently following the policies, and some employee in a good book has been given a favor. So, it says the case study for other employees to quote that if he, this employee, has been given a favor, why not us? So, I believe department of HR should be more vigilant and focused and should, uh, should be strict to the policies so that these scenarios, these cultures should not be promoted.'

As per the recommendation of the participants, organizations should develop policies to ensure that human resource processes are followed and that everything runs well. On the same note, OP will be lessened if workers in the organizations are aware of the aims and objectives, what they are expected to perform, and how to accomplish them. Organizations should bring objectivity and set KPIs for performance evaluation of the employees. Employees should not be promoted on the basis of favoritism, and this is only possible through organizational culture without any discrimination.
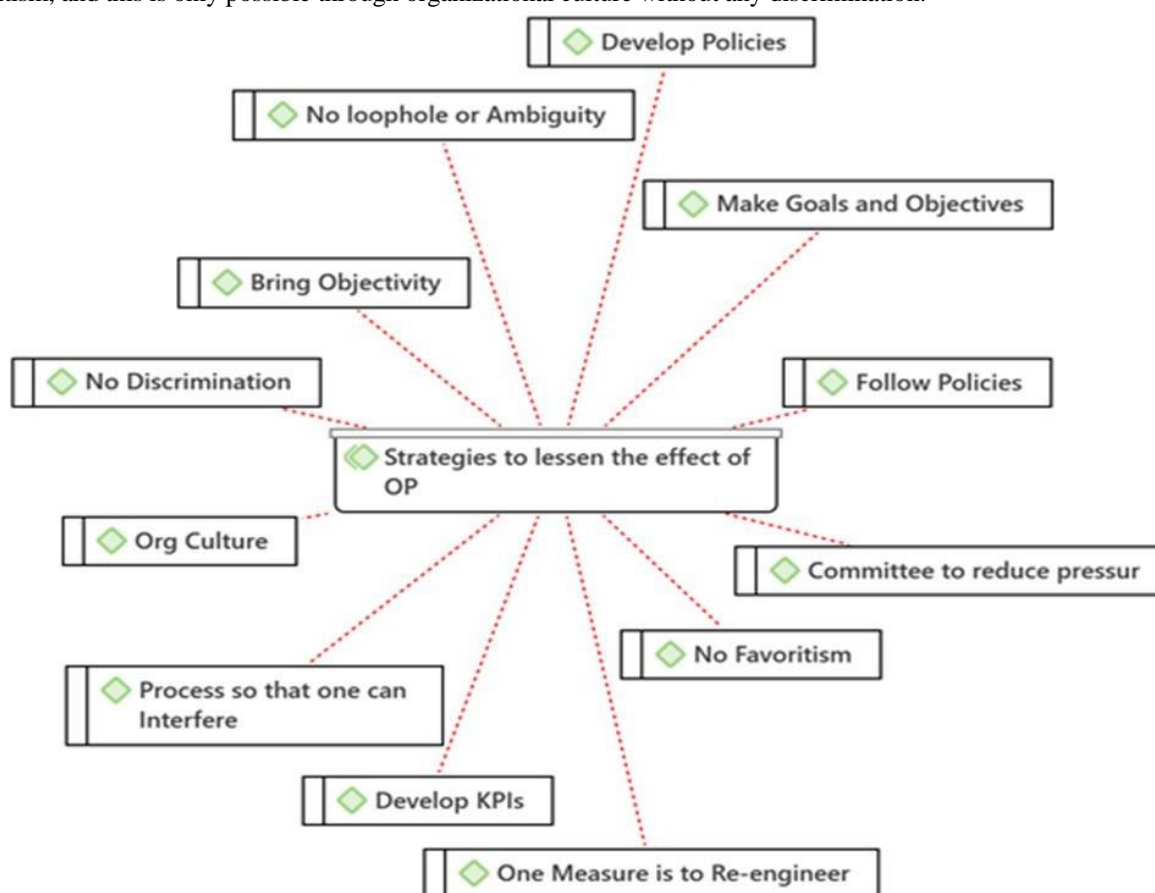

Figure 4 Strategies to lessen the effect of Organizational Politics

Source: Authors generated

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion:

The study provided the answers to the research questions. The first objective of this study is to explore how organizational politics is defined and understood in public sector HEIs of Pakistan and found that OP is the activity done by the employees for the sake of personal benefits, collective benefits, and lobbying (making groups/unions for endorsing the organizational processes), these results are consistent with the outcomes of the study of (Drory, & Vigoda, 2010). However, the results, according to the discussion with participants during the interviews, argued that employees inside the universities are trying their level best to get their favorite employees and relatives in open positions so that they can benefit from them when required. Similarly, they ranked them as high performers and collectively endorsed the university's higher authorities to promote the employee of their choice to top positions through groups like unions registered in the public sector HEIs.

The impact of OP on HRM practices in Pakistan's public sector HEIs is the second subject being examined in this study. According to the study's findings, organizational politics do affect and influence HRM practices in Pakistan's public sector higher education institutions. The widely used factors of OP include Reciprocity, Attacking/Blaming, Praising, Official Unions, and alliance with powerful people. These results are consistent with the study of Karen (2014). Likewise, during interviews, participants argued that employees tend to shift blame onto others, particularly juniors, for their own mistakes. Employees and university unions who have alliances with influential individuals put pressure on the university's higher authorities to accommodate their disproportionate demands.

The study's third question shed light on potential approaches to handling OP in public sector HEIs. The study results discovered that strategies like developing new policies, effectively implementing existing policies, revamping the organizational processes, and developing KPIs are essential to deal with organizational politics. These results are consistent with the study of Malik et al. (2019). As per the discussion with participants during interviews, they argued that public sector universities already have effective policies, procedures, and KPIs to deal with OP in the selection, evaluation, and promotion of employees. All that is required is for them to be carried out appropriately, which is often lacking in many public sector HEIs.

The study's major strength lies in the OP for human resources professionals and public sector HEIs that are practicing or implementing human resource functions, including selection, performance evaluations, and promotion. It emphasizes the significance of placing the right people in the right position at the right time through an effective recruitment and selection process. Evaluations based on performance are suggested, and talented employees are promoted when required. Since the study findings reveal that OP is meaningfully involved in HRM practices, HR professionals, HR firms, HEIs, and other employees working in the HEIs can benefit from this study in terms of hiring, evaluating, and promoting employees through the adaptation of efficient policies and procedures.

Implications
Theoretical Implications:
Conforming with SET, this study evidences that the relationship between an organization and its employees has a conflict of interest when employees are not given the value against the value they render to the organization (Stafford, & Kuiper, 2021). Such conflicts may involve taking credit for other's work due to evaluations based on recommendations or favoritism, or creating barriers that prevent other employees from achieving their goals (Chang et al., 2009), including the failure to promote deserving personnel. The findings of this study contribute and confirm that organizational politics do exist if the employees are not given the value that they expect from the organization for their services.

Practical Implications:
This study has various practical implications for HR professionals. Since the results of this study demonstrate that OP does influence and affect HRM practices in Pakistani public sector HEIs, therefore, HR departments in these institutions should create and implement policies to mitigate the negative effects of OP in HRM selection, performance evaluation, and promotion practices in the HEIs (Maitlo et al., 2020).

Recommendations and Future Direction
The study is limited to the HR and administrative employees. Further research on faculty and departmental heads is recommended, as university faculty members are essential resources for developing societies and the state through knowledge sharing. Three HRM practices are the main focus of this study. Since these are crucial components of organizational sustainability, further research on other HRM practices is advised, including succession planning, pay and benefits, and training and development. The study is conducted in the context of public-sector HEIs, more research in other contexts is recommended due to the significant existence of OP in almost every organization. Moreover, this study focuses solely on organizational politics. Further research is highly recommended to develop a new framework aimed at mitigating politicking behaviors in the workplace through the strategies suggested in this study.

Conclusion
The study's major goal is to investigate organizational politics in HRM practices in Pakistani public higher education institutions. The first objective of this study was to explore how organizational politics is defined and understood in public sector HEIs of Pakistan. It was found that OP is the activity done by the employees for the sake of personal benefits, collective benefits, and lobbying. Similarly, the second objective of this study is to explore whether OP affects the HRM practices in the public sector HEIs of Pakistan and study results revealed that organizational politics do have significant effects and are extensively involved in the HRM practices in public sector HEIs of Pakistan. The study's third goal is to offer potential solutions for dealing with organizational politics in public sector higher education institutions. These solutions include creating new policies, putting current ones into effect, revamping organizational procedures, creating KPIs, and more. Therefore, the findings highlight the significance of putting the recommended tactics into practice to prevent politicking behavior at Pakistan's public sector higher education institutions.

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