Workplace Political Dynamics and Their Influence on Employee Morale in Tertiary Institutions: Evidence from Non-Academic Staff in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract		Original Research Articles

This study examined the impact of workplace politics on employee morale among non-academic staff in selected tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, it assessed the effects of competition for control of resources on employee satisfaction, the influence of personality differences on staff collaboration, and the consequences of unclear leadership roles on decision-making processes. The study population comprised 2,327 non-academic staff across four institutions, from which a sample of 146 respondents was drawn using Taro Yamane's formula and proportional allocation. Primary data were collected via a structured questionnaire, achieving a 99.3% response rate. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) using SPSS and AMOS. Results indicated that competition for control of resources negatively affected employee satisfaction ($\beta = -0.623$, $p < 0.001$), personality differences undermined staff collaboration ($\beta = -0.567$, $p < 0.001$), and unclear leadership roles exerted the strongest negative effect on decision-making ($\beta = -0.712$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, workplace politics significantly reduced employee morale ($\beta = -0.687$, $p < 0.001$). The study concludes that workplace politics diminishes morale by fostering competition, conflict, and leadership ambiguity. Recommendations include implementing transparent resource allocation systems, introducing conflict management programs to address personality differences, and clarifying leadership structures to enhance decision-making and overall morale.

Keywords: Workplace Politics, Employee Morale, Competition for Resources, Personality Differences, Unclear Leadership, Employee Satisfaction, Staff Collaboration, Decision-Making.

1. Introduction

Workplace politics is an enduring and pervasive feature of organizational life, characterized by behaviors such as favoritism, lobbying, gossip, alliance-building, and power struggles—all aimed at influencing decisions or gaining control over limited organizational resources. In Nigerian tertiary institutions, these dynamics are intensified by bureaucratic structures, hierarchical systems, and ambiguous leadership roles, making workplace politics deeply embedded in institutional culture (Okoro & Adeyeye, 2023). While some argue that political strategies can help navigate rigid organizational frameworks, unchecked workplace politics consistently correlates with lower employee morale, increased turnover, strained interpersonal

relationships, and overall dissatisfaction (Ishola & Abubakar, 2022).

Workplace politics refers to informal behaviors and power tactics employed by individuals or groups to influence organizational outcomes or access resources, often outside formal processes. Ferris, Fedor, and King (2002) describe it as behavior aimed at maximizing self-interest, frequently at the expense of others. Conversely, employee morale captures the emotional, psychological, and motivational state of employees, reflecting their satisfaction, engagement, and sense of value within the organization. Nwachukwu and Anya (2023) define morale as encompassing emotional resilience, job satisfaction, and willingness to contribute fully to organizational goals.

The interplay between politics and morale has long been studied. Mintzberg (1983) highlighted the significance of informal influence in managerial decision-making, while the Hawthorne Studies (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) demonstrated the centrality of employee attitudes in productivity. In Nigeria, limited resources, weak accountability mechanisms, and a culture of favoritism exacerbate political behaviors. Non-academic staff—who maintain institutional operations—are particularly vulnerable, as they lack access to academic grants, research funding, and prestige afforded to academic colleagues (Bassey & Nnorom, 2021). When political behaviors dominate processes such as promotions, resource distribution, and decision-making, morale declines, especially among staff who perceive exclusion or marginalization.

Competition for scarce resources, including office space, training opportunities, promotions, and privileges, is a major driver of workplace politics. When allocation is determined by personal connections rather than transparent criteria, employee satisfaction is undermined (Okafor & Danjuma, 2022). Personality differences also contribute to political tension, as variations in behavior, temperament, and communication styles can create misunderstandings, exclusion, and weakened collaboration, particularly in politically charged environments (Olaoye & Ajayi, 2021). Additionally, unclear leadership roles generate

confusion and parallel power structures. Outdated or inconsistently enforced job descriptions in Nigerian tertiary institutions often allow individuals to act beyond their mandates if they maintain close ties to management, undermining accountability and decision-making effectiveness (Eze & Olatunji, 2021).

In Enugu State, institutions such as the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), and Peaceland College of Education reflect these challenges. Non-academic staff are essential for administration, logistics, and student services; yet, experiences of internal politics affect their access to opportunities, recognition, and fairness in the workplace (Ume & Chukwu, 2023). Previous studies have shown that politicized environments are linked to lower satisfaction and weaker collaboration (Nwosu & Idris, 2023; Adebayo & Salisu, 2021).

Employee morale—measured through satisfaction, collaboration, and decision-making—is directly affected by these political dynamics. When employees perceive that effort is unrewarded and decisions lack transparency, motivation declines. This study investigates the relationship between workplace politics and employee morale among non-academic staff in Enugu State tertiary institutions, addressing a critical gap in the literature. By examining competition for resources, personality differences, and unclear leadership roles, the study enhances understanding of how political behaviors influence morale in Nigerian higher education contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Workplace politics represents a multidimensional and pervasive organizational phenomenon that shapes employee experiences across sectors. It includes behaviors such as favoritism, manipulation, competition for scarce resources, and informal power struggles. These practices typically arise when individuals or groups attempt to influence decisions or secure advantages outside formally prescribed channels. Such politically motivated actions can

create tension, distort perceptions of fairness, and consequently weaken employee satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Employee morale, in contrast, reflects employees' collective attitudes, emotional disposition, and sense of satisfaction toward their work environment. It is shaped by factors such as organizational culture, policy implementation, interpersonal relationships, leadership transparency, and the equitable distribution of resources. Scholars consistently emphasize the strong connection between workplace politics and employee morale, particularly in work environments characterized by inadequate transparency and weak leadership structures (Dauda & Bradford, 2023; Oladejo, Obadare, & Samuel, 2022; Okechukwu & Salisu, 2022).

Competition for Control of Resources and Employee Satisfaction

One of the most visible dimensions of workplace politics is competition for control of scarce organizational resources. In tertiary institutions, these resources may include office equipment, training opportunities, funding allocations, task assignments, or promotional pathways. Ekpenyong and Ojeaga (2022) reported that in many Nigerian universities, access to such resources is frequently shaped by lobbying, alliances, or favoritism—rather than transparent, merit-based processes. This undermines trust and contributes to perceptions of inequity among staff.

Similarly, Ehimare and Ogaga-Oghene (2021) observed that fairness in resource distribution is strongly associated with higher job satisfaction and morale. Akintoye (2022) further found that equitable incentives and welfare arrangements enhance employees' sense of belonging and satisfaction. These studies collectively demonstrate that politically motivated resource allocation reduces satisfaction and weakens morale, while transparent and equitable distribution fosters commitment and positive workplace attitudes.

Personality Differences and Staff Collaboration

Personality differences constitute another important factor shaping interpersonal relations and collaboration in the workplace. Variations in personality traits influence communication styles, teamwork tendencies, conflict management, and willingness to collaborate. Onileowo and Fasuan (2021) found that traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness promote commitment and teamwork, whereas other traits may create friction and communication breakdowns.

Earlier work by Olukayode and Ehigie (2005) highlighted the influence of psychological diversity on team dynamics, noting that personality variations can affect how tasks are shared and how team members interact. More recently, Adeniji, Salau, and Joel (2024) demonstrated that personality composition within teams significantly predicts collaborative performance in Nigerian SMEs, supporting the view that well-managed personality diversity can enrich teamwork. For non-academic staff in tertiary institutions, this evidence suggests that unmanaged personality differences may disrupt collaboration and lower morale, while structured diversity management can promote cohesion and engagement.

Unclear Leadership Roles and Decision-Making

Leadership clarity is essential for smooth organizational functioning, yet many Nigerian tertiary institutions suffer from ambiguous role definitions and overlapping authority structures. Ige and Adelunke (2022) found that unclear hierarchies and non-transparent decision-making processes restrict staff participation and lead to delays, inefficiencies, and internal conflict. This ambiguity often creates opportunities for informal power brokers to dominate decision processes, reinforcing political behavior.

Brandford-Adams and Daniel (2020) similarly observed that institutions with centralized and ambiguous leadership structures tend to record lower productivity and staff engagement compared to those with participatory and clearly defined leadership systems. Unegbu et al. (2023) empirically established that role clarity enhances decision-making efficiency, improving speed, accuracy, and accountability among university library staff. These findings underscore the importance of clear

leadership roles and reporting lines in enhancing decision-making and employee morale.

Workplace Politics and Employee Morale

The interplay among these dynamics—resource competition, personality differences, and leadership ambiguity—forms the broader construct of workplace politics. When unchecked, these political behaviors create an environment characterized by mistrust, conflict, and inequity. Dauda and Bradford (2023) observed that favoritism and non-transparent promotion practices significantly reduce morale among tertiary institution staff. Oladejo et al. (2022) also reported a negative link between perceived organizational politics and employee performance. Similarly, Okechukwu and Salisu (2022) found that political self-interest and communication breakdown contribute to declining morale and heightened workplace conflict.

Collectively, the literature reveals that workplace politics undermines morale through reduced satisfaction, weakened collaboration, and compromised decision-making. These effects are particularly pronounced in tertiary institutions where administrative structures are bureaucratic and resources limited.

2.2 Summary of Literature and Research Gap

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that workplace politics adversely affects employee satisfaction, collaboration, and decision-making—three major determinants of employee morale. While prior studies have investigated these relationships across various sectors, most have focused on academic staff or institutional contexts outside Enugu State. Few studies have comprehensively examined how workplace politics influences the morale of **non-academic staff** across multiple tertiary institutions within this specific geographical region.

This gap highlights the need for empirical evidence that captures the unique experiences of non-academic personnel, who play essential administrative and operational roles in higher education institutions. The present study addresses this gap by examining the effects of resource competition, personality differences, and leadership clarity on employee morale within selected tertiary institutions in Enugu State.

3 Theoretical Review

Organizational Behavior Theory

Organizational Behavior Theory offers a fundamental lens for understanding how individuals, groups, and organizational structures interact to shape workplace dynamics. The theory posits that employee behavior emerges from the interplay between organizational culture, structural arrangements, leadership patterns, and power relations. Within highly politicized work environments, these elements influence the prevalence of behaviors such as favoritism, rivalry, manipulation, and role ambiguity.

Adeyemi and Nwafor (2022) argue that power play and informal influence structures within Nigerian tertiary institutions often distort formal processes, undermining organizational effectiveness and affecting employee outcomes. As applied to this study, Organizational Behavior Theory provides a framework for explaining how internal political activities shape employee morale by influencing satisfaction, collaboration, perceived fairness, and the clarity of organizational roles.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, credited to Homans (1961) and later expanded by Blau (1964), explains workplace relationships through the principles of reciprocity, fairness, and trust. The theory proposes that employees assess their relationship with the organization by comparing their contributions with the rewards, recognition, and treatment they receive. When employees perceive inequitable exchanges—such as biased resource distribution, favoritism, or political exclusion—the psychological contract becomes violated.

This imbalance often results in reduced morale, disengagement, and withdrawal behaviors. Ebong and Nwosu (2023) affirm that in Nigerian institutions, informal networks and perceived injustice stemming from workplace politics erode trust and weaken employee commitment. In this

study, Social Exchange Theory helps illuminate why political behaviors that signal unfairness or unequal treatment negatively influence employee morale and collaborative attitudes among non-academic staff.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Maslow, 1943) posits that human motivation progresses sequentially from basic physiological needs to higher-order needs such as esteem and self-actualization. For employees to attain higher-level motivation—such as professional fulfillment, recognition, and meaningful contribution—their work environment must support clarity, fairness, and psychological safety.

However, in workplaces characterized by political favoritism, unclear leadership roles, and interpersonal conflicts, employees may find their esteem and self-actualization needs obstructed. Anosike and Ezenwafor (2023) demonstrate that communication ambiguity and inconsistent role expectations reduce employee engagement in Nigerian public institutions. In the context of this study, Maslow's framework explains how politicized environments suppress morale by preventing non-academic staff from achieving the motivational states required for optimal performance and organizational commitment.

4. Empirical Review

A considerable body of empirical research has explored the impact of workplace politics on various employee outcomes, including morale, satisfaction, collaboration, and decision-making. Dauda and Bradford (2023) reported that workplace politics manifested through favoritism, ineffective communication, and non-transparent promotion practices significantly reduced enthusiasm and commitment among staff in tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria. Similarly, Oladejo, Obadare, and Samuel (2022) found a strong negative relationship between perceived organizational politics and employee performance in private sector organizations, demonstrating the pervasive influence of political behavior across different institutional contexts.

Evidence also highlights the detrimental effects of resource-based competition on satisfaction and morale. Ekpenyong and Ojeaga (2022) showed that favoritism in resource allocation within Nigerian universities consistently lowered staff morale, as employees perceived such allocations as unjust and politically motivated. In support of this, Ehimare and Ogaga-Oghene (2021) emphasized that equitable distribution of organizational resources significantly enhances employee satisfaction, indicating that fairness remains central to sustaining morale in institutional settings.

Regarding personality differences, empirical studies have demonstrated their role in shaping teamwork and collaboration. Onileowo and Fasuan (2021) found that personality traits such as agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively associated with teamwork, while unmanaged personality differences often lead to conflict and weakened collaboration. Adeniji, Salau, and Joel (2024) further confirmed that personality composition significantly influences collaborative performance in Nigerian SMEs, suggesting that the impact of personality dynamics extends beyond organizational size and industry type. These findings imply that without deliberate management, personality differences can undermine cohesion and reduce morale among staff.

Leadership clarity has also received considerable empirical attention. Unegbu et al. (2023) reported that clearly defined leadership roles and reporting lines significantly enhance decision-making efficiency among university library staff in Nigeria. Conversely, Ige and Adelunke (2022) found that ambiguous leadership structures and unclear hierarchies constrain staff participation and delay administrative processes in tertiary institutions. These findings reinforce the argument that leadership ambiguity contributes to confusion, inefficiency, and diminished morale, particularly in environments where decision-making requires clear authority and coordination.

Overall, the reviewed empirical evidence reveals a consistent pattern: workplace politics—through resource competition, personality dynamics, and leadership ambiguity—negatively affects employee morale and related outcomes. These findings provide

a strong foundation for the present study, which examines these dynamics specifically among non-academic staff in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.

5. Methodology

This study employed a **survey research design** to examine the influence of workplace politics on employee morale among non-academic staff in selected tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria. The survey design was deemed appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data directly from respondents and facilitates the analysis of relationships among the variables of interest. This approach is particularly suitable for studies investigating perceptual constructs such as workplace politics, leadership clarity, personality differences, and employee morale.

The study was conducted across four tertiary institutions in Enugu State:University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Peaceland College of Education. These institutions were purposively selected to ensure representation of both public and private higher education establishments within the state. They also depend significantly on non-academic staff to sustain administrative, technical, and operational functions, making them appropriate settings for examining workplace politics and its implications. The diversity of institutional structures provided a robust platform for understanding variations in political behavior and morale across different organizational environments.

Institution	Number of Non-Academic Staff
University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus	1293
Enugu State University of Science and Technology	643
Institute of Management and Technology	324
Peaceland College of Education	67
Total	2327

The study population comprised 2,327 non-academic staff from four tertiary institutions. Using Taro Yamane's formula with an 8% margin of error, a sample size of 146 was calculated and proportionally distributed among the institutions. Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representative coverage across all administrative units.

Primary data were collected via a structured questionnaire developed to align with the study objectives. The instrument was designed to measure three dimensions of workplace politics—

competition for control of resources, personality differences, and unclear leadership roles—alongside three indicators of employee morale: satisfaction, collaboration, and decision-making. Out of the 146 questionnaires administered, 145 were returned fully completed, yielding a 99.3% response rate.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in IBM SPSS 26 and AMOS 26. The reliability and validity of the constructs were evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance

Extracted (AVE). Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level. Model assessment included examination of factor loadings, composite reliability, AVE, and fit indices to evaluate the robustness of the constructs and the hypothesized relationships.

5. Results and Findings

A total of 146 questionnaires were distributed, of which 145 were fully completed and returned, representing a response rate of 99.3%. Respondents were drawn from four tertiary institutions in Enugu State: the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (81 respondents), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (40 respondents), Institute of Management and Technology (20 respondents), and Peaceland College of Education (5 respondents). The sample demonstrated a balanced demographic distribution across age, gender, educational qualifications, and years of service.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis of the study objectives revealed significant insights into the impact of workplace politics on employee morale and related dimensions. The majority of respondents (68.3%) indicated that internal power struggles negatively affected their enthusiasm and organizational commitment. Similarly, 70.4% reported that favoritism and office rivalry diminished their willingness to perform effectively. Conversely, 85.5% highlighted that respect and fairness from management substantially motivated them, while 84.8% emphasized that team spirit and equitable treatment strengthened their commitment, reinforcing the positive link between fair management practices and morale.

Regarding competition for control of resources, respondents identified it as a major factor undermining satisfaction. About 64.9% agreed that rivalry for institutional resources and unequal distribution of funds and tools caused tension, and 58.6% expressed dissatisfaction with resource hoarding by senior staff. However, 80% reported that fair resource allocation significantly enhanced their motivation, demonstrating the critical role of equity in sustaining employee satisfaction.

Personality differences produced mixed outcomes. While 54.5% of respondents admitted that personality clashes often led to misunderstandings and reduced cooperation, 64.2% acknowledged that teams successfully managed diversity and conflicts. Moreover, 73.1% believed that personality diversity, when effectively handled, promoted balance and improved collaboration. These findings highlight the importance of conflict management and awareness of personality dynamics in leveraging team diversity for enhanced productivity.

Unclear leadership roles were identified as a major barrier to effective decision-making. Over half of the respondents (56.5%) reported uncertainty regarding who held decision-making authority in their units, and 64.2% observed confusion arising from multiple individuals assuming leadership roles. In contrast, 77.3% agreed that clear leadership improved decision-making speed, while 81.4% emphasized that role clarity enhanced operational efficiency. These results indicate that ambiguity in leadership structures significantly impedes decision-making processes in tertiary institutions.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlations revealed significant associations among the constructs ($p < 0.01$). The strongest relationship was observed between employee satisfaction and overall morale ($r = 0.698$), indicating that satisfaction serves as a key pathway through which workplace politics influences morale.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Latent Constructs

Construct	1	2	3	4
Competition for Resources	1.000			
Personality Differences	0.487**	1.000		

Unclear Leadership	0.523**	0.412**	1.000	
Workplace Politics	0.612**	0.534**	0.678**	1.000

Note: All correlations are significant at p < 0.01 (two-tailed).

Measurement and Structural Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed that all factor loadings were above 0.70 and statistically significant (p < 0.001). Reliability and validity tests also met recommended thresholds, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding 0.80 and average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.50.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Metrics

Latent Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	√AVE	Max Correlation
Competition for Resources	0.856	0.863	0.612	0.782	0.523
Personality Differences	0.823	0.831	0.587	0.766	0.567
Unclear Leadership	0.841	0.849	0.594	0.771	0.634
Employee Satisfaction	0.789	0.798	0.679	0.824	0.698
Staff Collaboration	0.812	0.819	0.623	0.789	0.623
Decision Making	0.798	0.806	0.601	0.775	0.634
Employee Morale	0.867	0.874	0.645	0.803	0.698

All model fit indices demonstrated a good fit (CMIN/DF = 1.185, CFI = 0.967, RMSEA = 0.034, SRMR = 0.045).

Hypothesis Testing

The structural model confirmed all hypothesized relationships.

Table 3: Standardized Path Coefficients for Hypothesized Relationships

Path	β (Estimate)	SE	C.R.	p-value	Result
CR → ES	-0.623	0.087	-7.161	***	Significant
PD → SC	-0.567	0.092	-6.174	***	Significant
UL → DM	-0.712	0.081	-8.790	***	Significant
WP → EM	-0.687	0.083	-8.277	***	Significant

Note: *** denotes p < 0.001 (two-tailed).

These results demonstrate that competition for resources significantly undermines satisfaction, personality differences weaken collaboration, and unclear leadership roles severely impede decision-making. Overall, workplace politics exerts a strong negative effect on employee morale among non-academic staff in tertiary institutions.

6. Discussion of Findings

The study's findings indicate that competition for resources significantly reduces employee satisfaction, consistent with Dauda and Bradford (2023), who reported that scarcity-driven rivalry diminishes job satisfaction in Nigerian universities.

Similarly, Ikoroma (2021) found that inequitable distribution of institutional resources weakens staff commitment, highlighting the importance of fairness in resource allocation.

Personality differences were also found to negatively affect collaboration, aligning with Mande and Ishaq (2018), who argued that unmanaged personality conflicts hinder teamwork in tertiary institutions. However, the study also revealed that personality diversity can enhance collaboration when effectively managed. This observation supports Ojeleye, Falola, and Iroanusi (2022), who emphasized the benefits of personality awareness and conflict management training in academic settings.

Unclear leadership roles emerged as the most significant impediment, undermining effective decision-making. This finding corroborates Ojeleye, Muktar, and Salami (2023), who identified leadership ambiguity as a key driver of workplace politics in Nigerian higher education institutions. The correlation analysis further underscored the mediating role of satisfaction, in line with Ekejiuba, Muritala, Maitala, and Nwoye (2023), who argued that employee morale is largely shaped by the political environment's impact on satisfaction and commitment.

Overall, the results demonstrate that workplace politics fosters rivalry, confusion, and conflict, thereby undermining satisfaction, collaboration, and decision-making. Conversely, the findings highlight that fairness, transparency, and clarity in leadership roles are critical for sustaining employee morale and enhancing institutional effectiveness.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the impact of workplace politics on employee morale among non-academic staff in tertiary institutions in Enugu State. The findings revealed that competition for resources diminishes employee satisfaction, personality differences can weaken collaboration, and unclear leadership roles impede effective decision-making. Overall, workplace politics was found to significantly lower morale, with leadership ambiguity identified as the most critical factor.

The study confirms that favoritism, internal rivalry, and ambiguous authority structures undermine staff commitment, whereas fairness, respect, and transparency enhance motivation, teamwork, and organizational cohesion. These insights underscore the need for institutional systems that reduce political behavior and promote equitable practices.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Transparent Resource Allocation:** Institutions should establish clear and transparent frameworks for distributing resources to minimize rivalry and perceptions of bias.

2. **Conflict Management and Team Development:** Staff development programs focusing on conflict resolution, teamwork, and personality awareness should be implemented to harness the benefits of diversity effectively.

3. **Strengthening Leadership Structures:** Leadership roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined through detailed job descriptions, accountability mechanisms, and well-articulated reporting lines.

4. **Promoting Fairness and Respect:** Cultivating a culture of fairness, respect, and transparency in workplace interactions will sustain morale and enhance overall institutional effectiveness.

By addressing these areas, tertiary institutions can mitigate the adverse effects of workplace politics, boost employee morale, and improve operational efficiency and effectiveness.

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