

Exploratory Study of Grandiosity in Employees Training System: A Case Study of the University of Agriculture, Peshawar

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Abstract

Employees' training function has its specific problems that are affecting its outcome. There is another 'problem' that has been affecting it too - the problem of "grandiosity". It is overblown reality and projection; having its causes and effects in the domain of this research. This imperceptible problem has been exposed by remaining close to the data obtained through 15 in-depth interviews - the co-construction of reality, in the research undertaking. This piece of work has allied the construct - "grandiosity" in context of employees training function as well as with other operations of a public sector university. The study further recounted causes(08) and effects(04) of the practice of grandiosity in context of a public sector institution. The researchers' contribution is exploring the employees' training function in the public sector universities. The research also adds to the existing literature on the theme – the practice of grandiosity. The recommendations in the research area are beneficial and result-oriented for public sector organisations and in particular for universities.

Keywords: employees training, public sector, grandiosity, grounded theory, non-realistic reporting

Introduction

There are more than 200 public and private sector universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan. In the domain of employee performance management, it is reported (Iqbal, Arif, & Abbas, 2011) that HRM functions including “employees’ training”, job definition, compensation, teamwork, and employees’ participation were “better” in the public universities as compared to private universities. However, effective capacity-building initiatives and training opportunities are not adequately provided (Rasheed, Humayon, Awan, & Ahmed, 2016) to the employees in public sector universities. Majority of them are employed without significantly contributing or adding value to the public sector service delivery (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). They do not possess the attitude and skills needed to meet their professional obligation.

Employees' training and learning is considered a significant part of their organisational policies (Coetzer, 2007). Similarly, in developing countries like Pakistan, at the policy level, provision of educational opportunities, Performance improvement their performance, and demonstrating the benefits of training to employees have remained a priority (ASP-RSPN, 2012). However, mostly

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incompetent, non-performer, and unskilled employees continue to occupy public sector organisations in Pakistan. The training programmes and initiatives in their respective organisations are ineffective.

The employees' training function and programmes seem to be glittered and affected by the "bandwagon effect". In efforts to present training programmes in the public sector organisations as a high success and effective, policy documents and training reports are permeated with exaggeration. The employees' training programmes have been celebrated and cherished so much that their true face and underlying realities are camouflaged. The contextual approach can be identified and recognised as a practice of "grandiosity" (Alvesson, 2013) in terms of employees training.

The qualitative research explored the prevalence of the predicted emergent problem 'grandiosity' in employees training "what grandiosity is?", its causes, and effects in the context. Besides this, the objective of the research was achieved by identify causes of grandiosity in employees' training system, and the effects that the institutional performance in general and in particular on the practice of grandiosity on employees training in a public sector university.

Literature Review

Employees Training in Developing Countries

The quality of public service delivery is linked with the quality and capacity of human resource working in the public sector organisations. Mostly, there is no question on the potential and effective management skills of the human resource in public sector organisations. Similarly, best practices in public service delivery (Grote, 2000), and innovative performance management (Spren, Afonso, & Gerrish, 2020) can particularly be observed in the developed world. However, actual performance management and public sector service delivery scenario in most of developing countries are difficult.

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices have diminished and illusionary presence. HR resource departments, that exists usually have weaker administrative and managerial capabilities. These organisations are characterized by unproductivity on part of employees and deviant workplace behaviour (Nasir & Bashir, 2012). Adoption of the holistic HRM system in public sector organisation is unavoidable on part of these organisations. Training and capacity building as important HR function (Akhorshaideh, 2013; Kraiger, 2014) has supplemental significance in the organisations where the quality of public service delivery (ASP-RSPN, 2012) is directly dependent on employees.

The universities' employees mostly realized the importance of learning, training, and skilled in a formal way (Mcdowall & Saunders, 2010). However, ironically, the inappropriately planned trainings seldom improve their skills, knowledge & performance. In spite of the fact, they still like to continue their job in the public sector if they remain under some sort of training for a longer period (Hur, 2017). Training is regarded as a pre-requisite activity and a ladder in the bureaucratic hierarchy to go up (ASP-RSPN, 2012). Being engaged in a short-term training activity is fun for employees – *ithaka* (Tsoukas, Patriotta, Sutcliffe, & Maitlis, 2020), feel pleasure in the process rather than in the outcome. The reason for this illusion is the prevalent mindset of considering training activity as a source of additional financial gain and as an escape from routine boring work-life.

Problems in Training Function

Employees training in public sector universities have not been effective. There is no defined policy regarding employees training (Ahmad, Ghani, & Rashid, 2018). The training programmes have certain problems when it comes to implementation, execution (Nasreen & Mirza, 2012), transfer (Bauer, Speaks, Howard, Landers, & Cameron, 2014) and effectiveness. The nonexistence of employees training gives strange impression since the universities themselves are mandated for human resource development.

Ideally, it must be carried out by every organisation or a business as a step-wise process. It has problem at every step of the standard and systematic process (Noe, 2017) i.e. pre-training need assessment, during the training- implementation, and post-training evaluation and transfer of training. University authorities or nominating officers comply with the nomination requested without assessing relevant performance gaps or assessing the nominees' training needs.

This research unveils a new managerial and organisational problem that is affecting employees training in public sector universities. The problem is "Grandiosity" coined by Mats Alvesson (2013). The data collected in this research further established that organisations in developing countries are equally affected by the practice of grandiosity. In backdrop of the given weaker governance structure, coupled with other social and cultural factors, the existence and practice of Grandiosity is 'complex' and more peculiar in nature. Main contribution of the research is to explore the training system in public sector university thus contributing to the existing knowledge on employees training. Secondly, it also contribute to the existing literature by elaborating the recent literature on grandiosity construct, its practice in public sector organizations (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Gabriel, 2015; Siltaoja, Juusola, & Kivijärvi, 2018) and its effects on organizational performance and outcome.

Grandiosity – the Problem under Consideration

Mats Alvesson (2013) in his book criticised the efforts to overemphasise promotion, projection, and reporting of the reporters' respective roles, activities, and achievements in a grandiose manner. At the same time, such efforts are important on part of the individual, organisational and societal projections. Significant amount of time and money is spent on these promotional approaches (Alvesson, 2013) merely to shift focus from substance to the image (Siltaoja et al., 2018). Apparently, we all “want to be in the public eye, confirmed, associated with something prestigious, and to distance ourselves from what is trivial” and insignificant (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2015). The temptation to look good and boost things needs to be checked.

Similarly, the weaker status of employees training in public sector universities is cherished, reported, and mostly marketed as a high achievement. The “all is well” reporting and perception of training seem to be affected by the dilemma of grandiosity. Employees' training in the public sector is pretentiously presented as a specialized, important, all-encompassing, and flawless activity and process.

This contemporary dilemma is obstructing critical thinking and management learning (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2015). At the individual level, human being does not like to be indulged in hardship, complex functions, and systems, importantly though, wants to listen to “all is well”. Being praised and indulged in self-praising for miniature or none achievements or projecting personal qualities is a common practice, which therefore generally goes on unnoticed. Now is the time to explicitly deliberate the theme of grandiosity and its seductive nature in education and learning activities as an alluring but problematic character (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2015). Employees' training in public sector universities is one of the areas that can highly be marked by the phenomena of “grandiosity”.

Methodology and Design

This research has used a qualitative research method with a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis. The researchers used Kathy Charmaz's constructionist stance (Charmaz, 2000). The socially constructed relationship existed between the individual employee experiencing the training process and its problems both conventional/procedural and the predicted one – grandiosity. The interchangeable terms ‘constructionism’ and ‘social constructionism’ in context of grounded theory were first used by Kathy Charmaz (2006,2001). The grounded theory approach is more creative, original, and meaningfully (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) relevant. Remaining open to data and the emerging theory (Reay, Bouchal, & Rankin, 2016) required researchers to be theoretically

sensitive as it is a fundamental principle of grounded theory. The development of theory is thus grounded in the data received from participants of a study explaining their experiences of the processes and practice they are engaged in.

The sample unit, the 15 respondents, of the research was derived from the officials working in the University of Agriculture Peshawar as respondents (R)/ participants based on a specific set of characteristics, relevancy to the area under research, and information possessed (Omona, 2013). Under the social constructionists' approach, sample size chosen may be small but the investigation should be in-depth and over time (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). This research has chosen the sub-type of purposive sampling or judgemental sampling (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016). Data collection consisted of individual one-to-one detailed interviews (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007) conducted by the researchers. The "differently" and unique data (Newman, 2012) collected in the research context was a thought-provoking and enriching experience.

Interviews audio-recorded with permission (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007) were transcribed into the English language for initial chunk by chunk coding to the ultimate concept and category development, the higher level of abstraction – theme. These themes or theory's leads emerged in the shape of findings that have sufficiently explored the practice of "Grandiosity" in employees' training activities as well as its existence in other organisational functions of the seats of higher learning.

Ethical standards including objectivity, reliability, validity of data, transparency and care are essential in analysis of data (writing memos, coding data, categorizing and theorizing data in the iterative process involved) in the grounded theory approach in qualitative research. It involves remaining open to the data and emergence of a theory (G. Reay et al., 2016) using computer assisted data analysis application like MS excel instead of verifying some theory or researchers' preconception. Researcher(s) has to interpret, conceptualize, examine relationships, document decisions, and develop theory (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004) because it required human interpretation.

Results

Findings of the research study explored the existence of the practice grandiosity [defined with the help of sub themes], causes of grandiosity, and its effects on the training and other functions of the University.

What Grandiosity is?

Grandiosity in organisational context is portraying organisational operations, roles, and accomplishments unrealistically superior and remarkable (Alvesson, 2013). Juncture of the following elements and actions result in the emergence of grandiosity in the practices and functions of a public sector university.

‘Saying’ it Overly

It is observed that the benefits of employees’ training are overstated. This, in the case of employees’ training, is impeding the approach to improve the training function and multiply its impact. The “end of the day” “happy picture” is not a true representation of the reality of a training activity.

A respondent reported that *“Employees’ interest was high and they all were very happy. Those who were not happy due to training, ... were [at least] happy and satisfied with food and refreshment”* (R7, L308).

Showing Strengths

By the virtue of their role, administrative employees are shown as significant and capable but the reality is the opposite. They are seldom trained in real terms. A respondent maintained that *“Here is no training specific for administration staff ...”* (R6, L9)

Attention-Seeking Behavior

Human beings naturally seek attention. It gets intense in case of the individuals who lack self-esteem. Importantly, fulfilling the need for prestige and a feeling of accomplishment also leads the subject toward grandiosity. Socially and culturally, something normal and appropriate but characterized by “a more or less hidden tendency” to exaggerate and constantly boost status, significance, and identity can also be termed ‘grandiosity’. A respondent reported that *“Yes, we are just showing something that does not even exist there”* (R8, L355). Thus, both individuals and organisations may be witnessed to gain from such a boost in the image but this is at the cost of their performance which suffers from a false sense of achievement.

Hyped up Projection

In order to be in competition, hyped up projection of products & services is done. The non-realistic promotion and unbalanced marketing result in exaggeration. The same is true for employees’ training function. Use of hyped-up language by representatives and stakeholders reading reporting training activity and function affected by grandiosity. A respondent reported that *“Again, we need training for this [to control exaggeration and be realistic in reporting]”* (R2, L174). A respondent maintained that *“I think, we can take this in a way*

that the training coordinator or the one conducting training wants to show his performance more. So from that perspective, I think, he exaggerates.” (R1, L363).

Pretending Performance and Productivity

The data also revealed that grandiosity is practiced everywhere in order to pretentiously project and report performance. Showing “pseudo” productivity and performance by displaying a rosy picture and pretending that everything is fine, perfect, and peaceful is to hide failure and ‘emptiness’ (Siltaoja et al., 2018). A respondent maintained that *“We want to show that we are perfect, we are peaceful. Here prevails peace and only peace [no issues], here exists happiness and happiness all around”* (R8, L383).

Causes of Grandiosity

The data revealed that there are certain ways to establish that employees training is affected by Grandiosity. These ways are embedded in the procedures and processes that are being performed or opted by individuals concerned during employees’ training function in particular and complying with routine activities and responsibilities in general. Following are the causes [instances] of Grandiosity;

Un Realistic Reporting an Activity & Achievement

Grandiosity results from reporting an activity and achievement un-realistically in a way that it looks good. An effort is made to make things look good and baselessly portray an ordinary activity as a success. Similarly, reporting the un-systematic employees’ training activities as good and claiming it as results-oriented also causes the practice of grandiosity. A respondent maintained that *“Yes it is there [in our reports]”* (R8, L414) and *“I see it, you see it, and everyone sees it, we exaggerate in our reports. That is all we do”* (R8, L414). A respondent reported that *“They say that everything is right and nothing needs to be corrected and improved”* (R6, L263).

The exaggeration, falsehood, and unrealistic boosting are intensified by the ever-lowering workplace ethics and the non-sensitizations to the professional obligation in a public sector university. A respondent reported that *“Other reason could be realization [of responsibility/ sensitization]. It is when an employee feels that how would he/she deliver. Actually [regardless of the level] you build [technical] capacities of the employees to any extent, he must himself realize the importance of professional honesty. Like, this is my duty; this is my organisation”* (R5, L249)

Absence of Systematic Approach to an Activity

One of the reasons for the practice of grandiosity in employees’ training function is its conduct wherein the systematic

approach is absent. Similarly, post-training evaluation/ outcomes are non-existing. Reporting pattern in the scenario promotes the practice of grandiosity. Respondents reported that “*Unfortunately, for a teacher to be recruited in a primary school, prior training is must for them. But in university when we do any sort of recruitment they are not prior trained, which is very bad.*” (R2, L13) and that “*University does not have its own [training] structure through which it train its faculty or support staff.*” (R2, L35). A streamlining system was proposed, “*... a system is the solution for training the staff across the board*” (R5, L366)

Exaggerated Reporting

It is the exaggeration, and grandiose reporting and presentation about organisational activities and achievements that result in Grandiosity in reporting employees’ training. A respondent confirmed it in a way that “*I think one who reports takes it to the higher level because he wants to report correctly. Like how did you conduct it, may be let’s suppose attendance of a person is 60% and since they have to get stipend on above 90% or 80%*” (R1, L345)

Marketing [Miss] Management & Balance

The dilemma of grandiosity emerges from [not] balancing and managing marketing in the publicity of organisational activities, operations, and achievements. A respondent reported that “*Unfortunately, you exaggerate because you are competing in the market internationally and locally; so you exaggerate, like you see packing of a product may be attractive but the product won’t be good*” (R2, L189). He also said that “*The exaggeration is practiced in [presenting our] services and products*” (R2, L210).

“All is Well” Reporting

It is reported that VCs and higher-ups at the universities are reported only by a few chosen ones that surround them. Performance shown is temporary, surface dressing and a rosy picture is displayed to higher-ups. This is because firstly “the boss” wants to listen to “all is well”.

A respondent reported that “*Because you know before him a flowery picture is displayed and he think all is perfect in his country and he is the best king in the world*”, (R8, L422)

Most of the time activities are reported as fine and ok. This “all is well” approach and fine reporting are equal and synonyms to grandiosity i.e. without *reflecting on any need for improvement*. An Office assistant reported that “*... It is the same problem as of the “all is well”. Inside situation will be different than the outside situation*” (R7, L276).

Covering Weaknesses & Failures

While practicing grandiosity, reporter, performer, or presenter whichever the case may be, want to hide their weak performance and the mistakes made. Rather picture of the University's functions and operations are presented as rosy and grandiose. A respondent reported that *"We have wasted the funds that have been given to us, we have wasted the time, right. We have burnt resources; we have given it fire for no good reasons yes. We are hiding it all"* (R8, L422)

Securing Funds

Quite vividly, it is observed that in universities, vision and mission are highly ambitious without being sufficiently linked to the ground realities, stakeholders' needs, actual performance, and the output level. Accordingly, grandiosity is practiced to secure funding. A respondent maintained that *"Yes, we are just showing something that does not even exist there"* (R8, L355) and *"Yes we do it. We do not show true picture"* (R8, L355). Similarly, *"When we are needing funds Khalid, we show ourselves so humble and helpless like we have nothing"*. (R8, L356)

Greed of Training Associated Benefits

In public sector organisations, employees are paid handsome amounts as traveling & daily allowance (TADA) for attending a training. Likewise, securing nominations and funding for future trainings is also one of the reasons for the grandiose projection. Other reasons for exaggeration and grandiose reporting of training function and outcome is the need and craving for name and fame through 'make oneself visible' (Siltaoja et al., 2018) and over-projection of professional credentials. A respondent of the study maintained that *"So naturally more money comes, name will go; their [fame] promotion of their name will be done. That is why they exaggerate"*. (R8, L399). A respondent maintained that *"...and second thing is that there is somewhere financial matters [financial benefit for the employees]"* (R9, L178).

Effects of Grandiosity

Effects of the practice of grandiosity on organisational and employees training function are as;

Grandiosity Affect the Future Planning

The practice of grandiosity, camouflages the lapses and weaknesses that exist in the organisational activities and employees' performance. It affects future planning that is targeting improvement in the organisational operations and training programme.

A Director Internal Audit of the University responded that *“With exaggeration in any form you get blur picture. Your immediate boss or the overall boss do not get clear picture [of actual performance and progress], so how they will deliver [decide and plan on the exaggerated reporting]. When the reports are not exaggerated then they get clear picture...”* (R5, L320).

Compromising Quality, Time & Resources

Allowing the practice of grandiosity in organisational functions and operations reporting is compromising quality, time, and resources without improving employees’ performance and the organisation. A respondent reported that *“Yes [due to such “all is right” reporting] gradually [employees and organisational] performance become weak and compromised”* (R6, L267).

Another respondent reported that *“Yes we are compromising a lot. We are compromising on our failure; we are badly failed in achieving our goals, our mission, objectives. We have failed in achieving it”* (R8, L420).

Ignoring Ground Realities & Participants’ Views

Grandiose reporting about employees’ training leads to ignoring the ground realities and ignoring the participants’ views. A respondent maintained that *“regardless of the ground realities and regardless of the participants’ views [and learning & their level of performance improvement as a result of the training”* (R9, L322).

A respondent stated that *“Defiantly, harm of the exaggeration is that we do not realize our weakness and till we don’t know about our weaknesses, we cannot plan the upcoming trainings”* (R1, L388).

Overlooking the Need for an Effective Activity/ Performance

Administration thinks that employees’ training system is working properly, thus overlooking the need and identification of the areas for improvement. A respondent maintained that *“Yes, the [training] system is not going right but they [administration] see the system as it is working properly. Although it is not [but] only deceptively”*(R9, L266).

Table 1

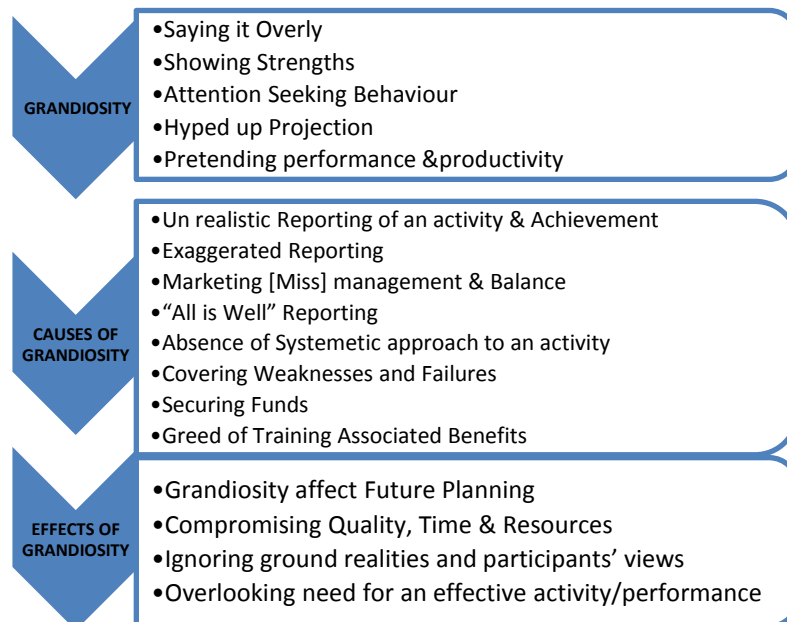
Summary (Findings)

| Themes | Category/ Factors |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| | Saying it Overly |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| WHAT GRANDIOSITY IS? | Showing Strengths Attention Seeking Behaviour Hyped up Projection Pretending performance & productivity |
| CAUSES OF GRANDIOSITY | Un realistic Reporting of an activity & Achievement Hyped-Up & Exaggerated Reporting Marketing [Miss] management & Balance “All is Well” Reporting Absence of Systemetic approach to an activity Covering Weaknesses and Failures Securing Funds Greed of Training Associated Benefits |
| EFFECTS OF GRANDIOSITY | Grandiosity affect Future Planning Compromising Quality, Time & Resources Ignoring ground realities & participants’ views Overlooking need for an effective activity/performance |

Source:PhD Research (data) of one of the Authors

The data retrieved and analysis has enabled the researchers to present their findings in the following flow chart.



Flow Chart: Grandiosity, Causes & Effects

Discussion

The study has resulted in three main themes. First, “what Grandiosity is?”, is defined with the help of sub-themes including saying it overly, showing strength, attention-seeking behaviour, hyped-up projection, and pretending performance and productivity. Second is the causes of Grandiosity that include reporting an activity & achievement, absence of systematic approach to an activity, exaggerated reporting, marketing [mis] management & balance, “all is well” reporting, covering weaknesses & failure, securing funding, and greed of training associated benefits. Lastly, the effects of grandiosity include compromised future planning, quality, time, and resources, ignored stakeholders’ views, and overlooking a need (for an activity/performance).

Conclusion

The causes include hyped-up projection, exaggerated reporting, marketing mismanagement, “all is well” slogan, absence of a training system, covering performance weaknesses and failures, securing funds, and the greed for training-associated benefits. The employees’ training process and activity are preferred primarily due to the associated benefits both for the trainees and trainers alike. In such like approaches, the practice of grandiosity arises. The causes list indicates that the practice of “grandiosity” is saying it overly, showing strength, attention-seeking, hyped-up projection, and pretending high performance and productivity. The causes have some effects that include compromising future planning, quality, time & resources. The stakeholders indulged in the practice ignore reality and overlook the need for an effective training system at an institution.

Theoretical Implications/ Contribution

Employees’ training has been extensively researched in present days, however, contextualizing it in association with the dilemma of ‘the practice grandiosity’ has never been explored. The definition, causes, and effects of the practice have enriched the nascent construct coined by Mats Alvesson (2013). The study further contributes to understanding the system of employees training in a public sector university. The findings have extended the researchers’ understanding of the dilemma of grandiosity in reporting employees training function and opened up a new research stream for future research.

Managerial Implications/ Contribution

- i. This research proposed a need for well-structured and functional employees training system.

- ii. Un realistic reporting leads to exaggeration and grandiosity which needs to checked and factual status be reported. Secondly, ground realities, and critical reporting in view of performance improvement may be accepted.
- iii. To avoid financial and administrative issues, the University's authorities may check the temptation of exaggerated reporting and "all is well" reporting – the practice of grandiosity.

Future Research Directions

Obtaining insights and perceptions of knowledgeable respondents (key informants) through interviews and group discussions is significant. Research is also needed to tap stakeholders' perceived employees training and performance improvement construct. Studies of exploratory nature may further be extended to other public sector universities, institutions, and organisations to unearth more realities and pursue more innovative themes and the prevalent quest for more exploration in organisational studies continued. It is proposed that the missing dimension (capturing perspective and perceptions of employees of lower cadres) of the research area needs to be researched in the context of Pakistani public sector universities, organisations and institutions.

Limitations

In the University no specific department deals employees' training therefore, little documentary evidence and records have been maintained for the un-systematic employees' training. This situation was a major obstacle in data and content collection and accordingly analysis process. Obtaining insights and in-depth interviews where a major portion of research populations lack objective knowledge about the importance of training is limiting the overarching significance of the study. However, in grounded theory research approach sampling aimed toward theory construction and not representing a population (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, regarding the selection of the case and the sample size, the universities and DAIs in Pakistan are exceeding 200 in number and thus all could not be accessed for data collection and particularly engaging in-depth interviews, therefore, the case was restricted to the University.

Recommendations

This research study, after exploring the construct of grandiosity in employees training in a public sector university and based on the data, findings, and aforesaid discussion, put forward the following conclusion and some recommendations;

- i. Capacities of the employees may be built through effective HRM practices and specialized training function.
- ii. The capacity buildings should be implemented in true spirit and the performance improvement opportunities should not be wasted. The learning and skills improvement should be focused instead of eyeing training “associated” benefits.
- iii. Realizing importance of employees training is lacking which is indicating negligence in line with professional development of staff in public sector universities.
- iv. To address and remove the competence related challenges, employees’ training needs to be revived and reoriented by adopting advanced approaches and best practices at every level.
- v. Areas of improvement either in the case of performance or quality of service delivery need to be highlighted rather than hiding it. Performance matters and obligations should not be taken for granted.
- vi. Universities must check the practice of grandiosity and it is possible by reporting performance and success realistically. In this way, much of the admin and financial issues can be avoided.
- vii. The University must keep a balanced stance toward projecting its activities and achievements. In this way, the practice of grandiosity can be avoided. The operational loopholes and weaknesses can be eliminated and steps in the right direction can be taken.
- viii. Reality should not be ignored because overlooking issues and portraying “all is well” in un realistic reports and presentations is compromising performance and quality of service delivery in the University.

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