

Effects of red tape in public sector organizations: a study of government departments in Pakistan

Red tape in
public sector
organizations

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the emergence and integration of red tape and how its negative effects on public sector organizations' performance have weakened the economies of developing countries such as Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach – A structured questionnaire survey was completed by 121 respondents working in 35 government departments in Punjab, a province of Pakistan.

Findings – The findings revealed a link between red-tapism and employees' motivation and work. When there is excessiveness of rules and regulations, employees are prevented from completing assigned tasks, ultimately resulting in decreased work commitment. This indicates that the integration of red tape into public organizations not only affects employees' behavior and attitudes but also impacts the overall performance of public sector organizations.

Originality/value – This paper provides recommendations for the Pakistani government. For example, conducting training and motivational workshops for public sector employees can help them stay engaged with their work. Government departments should also review the steps and procedures involved so as to eliminate unnecessary steps and reduce red-tapism.

Keywords Bureaucracy, Red tape, Accountability, Centralization, Organizational performance, Pakistan

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The emergence of red tape and its integration into Pakistan's public sector has directly and indirectly disturbed the working systems of organizations in numerous provinces, resulting in low productivity and profitability. Bashir's (2011) analysis showed that the high integration of red-tapism into these organizations is the main reason for the government sector's weakness. Red-tapism has not only impacted organizations but also weakened the country's economy. Punjab, one of the four provinces of Pakistan, suffers from an excessiveness of rules and regulations. This stringency has gradually weakened the effectiveness of the province's public sector organizations.

Moynihan and Herd (2010) focused on the impact of red tape on organizations and how they perceive this concept. Red tape is a broad term that can be defined as procedures and rules imposed on public- and private-sector organizations that result in negative impact. Employees are the most valuable assets of organizations as their goals and objectives cannot be achieved without employees' input. Many organizations recognize their employees as the wheels of the vehicle; until or unless the wheels move, the vehicle cannot move. Neither can it begin the process of making or maximizing a profit (Moynihan and Herd, 2010).



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Red-tapism consists of the conditions, laws, rules, and procedures drafted and imposed by the government on the country's public and private organizations. Such policies are intended to reduce fraud, delay the time for task execution, and motivate employees to increase their work performance, thus improving organizational effectiveness and governmental performance (Subramanian and Kruthika, 2012). However, weak policies and rules in developing countries like Pakistan have failed to fulfil this purpose. Instead, organizations in these countries are impacted by delays induced by red tape because jobs are not completed on time. Programs fail to be executed by the date promised, increasing chances of corruption in public organizations. This leads to a belief among the public that government officials must be bribed into completing their work. Consequently, the worth of these public organizations is decreased by the delays caused by rampant red-tapism. Punjab, as the center of public organizations, is no exception (Wahab and Jawando, 2010).

Organizational productivity and red-tapism

Red-tapism influences organizational decision making. Such decisions fall into two main types: centralized and decentralized. Most public organizations, for example Pakistan International Airlines and the Pakistan Railway Authority, make centralized decisions partly because their employees have less experience, knowledge, and training as compared with those in the private sector. The performance of public sector employees deteriorates with time, rendering these organizations ineffective, and the mainly centralized decision-making process further reduces employee empowerment. Today, many high-level officials are considering privatizing these organizations because of their poor performance and dissatisfied customers (Subramanian and Kruthika, 2012).

Some research studies have emphasized employees' job satisfaction. High satisfaction reduces turnover rate, whereas low satisfaction leads to employees leaving in search of better jobs. Many components can influence job satisfaction, including working environment, salaries, organizational structure, teamwork, and red-tapism. When a new employee joins a government organization with a high integration of red tape, the employee can become exhausted. The job satisfaction may decrease to the extent that the employee will consider searching for another job. This is not conducive to the organization's success because it tends to lose good employees (Wahab and Jawando, 2010). Thus, the prevalence of red tape plays a negative role in public organizations by affecting the workforce.

One of the reasons of Pakistani economic downfall is due to the high use of red tape in public organizations, especially in Punjab Province. Red-tapism is the excessiveness of laws, procedures, and rules imposed by the government, which eventually delay organizations' work. It not only plays a negative role in the public sector but also has a profound impact on individuals' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, public service motivation, and work performance (Bashir, 2011).

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of red tape in public sector organizations and on the economy of Punjab. This study aims to create a clear understanding of the extent of red-tapism in the province of Punjab. It also contributes towards identifying measures that could reduce red tape in the government and make the public sector more effective. Lastly, it evaluates the impact of red-tapism on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, public service motivation, and individual performance in the organizations of Punjab.

The research questions are as follows:

- To what extent has red-tapism been integrated into the province of Punjab?
- To what extent has red-tapism directly affected and weakened the public sector organizations of Punjab?

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- To what extent has red-tapism affected job satisfaction, organizational commitment, public service motivation, and individual performance?

Literature review on red-tapism in organizations

Studies have investigated the impact of red-tapism on the economy and organizations' accomplishment of goals and tasks by examining different variables and their relationship with each other. This section presents several concepts discussed by researchers and economists on the impact of red tape on the public sectors of Punjab.

[Pandey et al. \(2007\)](#) presented an approach for increasing public organizations' efficiency. They also identified and offered a unified approach for the removal of bureaucratic red tape. The study utilized a questionnaire for data collection. The organizational effectiveness model was applied to public departments. Likewise, [Moynihan and Pandey \(2007\)](#) highlighted the impact of red tape on organizational performance. They argued that the integration of red tape into the bureaucratic system has profoundly affected organizations' performance.

[Moon and Bretschneider \(2002\)](#) focused on the identification, understanding, and development of the awareness of red tape. Several constraints were identified, and the key factor was the constraint of information technology in innovativeness. The initial results of the study suggested that red tape might lead to constraints on innovation in information technology. They found that the two main parameters — red tape and information technology innovativeness — are inter-related with each other. The study also discovered that top managers' risk-taking propensity (entrepreneurial leadership) and organizational capacity are positively associated with information technology innovativeness.

[DeHart-Davis and Pandey \(2005\)](#) focused on how the rule of dysfunction is linked with managers and higher level staff. [Wahab and Jawando \(2010\)](#) collected primary data for their research for the National Public Management Research Conference. Four main hypotheses were tested and verified. They also suggested several solutions for avoiding the issue of red tape to improve organizational and departmental performance. They stated that the centralized decision-making process should be avoided. The study also focused on job satisfaction, which can only be enhanced in public organizations through a decentralized architecture or structure. They further elaborated that a proper audit mechanism should be introduced in organizations so that the performance of lower level staff can be effectively monitored.

[Feeney and Rainey's \(2010\)](#) study of red tape in the public sector and non-profit organizations focused on institutional and political accountability. They argued that political accountability is central to improving organizations' performance. They also discussed a number of issues in the public sector resulting from the absence of institutional and political accountability. The authors felt that government bureaucracies are particularly subject to administrative constraints, such as red tape and personnel rules, that constrain pay, promotion, and dismissal and impact performance.

[Chaudhuri and Mandal \(2012\)](#) suggested that red tape plays a negative role for organizations by significantly affecting individual employee behavior. The researchers argued that behavior is not merely comprised of self-interested choices but also normative motives. If there is a high degree of red-tapism in a country, this will impact employees' affective motivation, which affects their overall behavior and leads to numerous problems.

[Ismail and Rashid \(2014\)](#) stated that further investigations of organizational influences should seek to assess the effects of organizational experiences and policies on the motivation of public service workers over time. [Moynihan and Pandey \(2007\)](#) demonstrated the impact of red tape on governmental and private organizations in the U.S. states of Georgia and Illinois.

Research methodology

This study utilizes data collected from primary sources through a questionnaire survey conducted in 2014. The respondents were 121 employees working in 35 different government

departments of Pakistan, mainly from the province of Punjab. They came from different levels of the hierarchy. Snowball, convenience, stratified, and area sampling were used to recruit the respondents. The focus was on the views and perceptions of the employees regarding red-tapism and how it affects work performance and organizational outcomes. The responses were analyzed with a focus on correlational and coefficient methods to investigate the impact on the dependent and independent variables.

The research hypotheses were formulated based on previous studies and the conceptual framework. The independent variable was red-tapism. There were seven dependent variables: centralization, performance and morale of public servants, job satisfaction, work engagement and commitment, organizations' performance, decision making, and welfare of the masses.

The formulation of hypotheses is one of the most significant parts of a study. Other steps include the design of collection methods, tools, and techniques for gathering the raw data. Both primary and secondary sources were used for the study. The primary sources consisted of respondents' answers to the questionnaire regarding the impact of red-tapism on Pakistan's governmental sector and the employees working there. The number of government staff who completed the questionnaire were considered as the respondents. The author also analyzed secondary sources, including journals, newspapers, and official public relations websites.

After determining the sample size, the process of data collection took place. The data were gathered through a questionnaire survey. Afterwards, the data were carefully analyzed and evaluated through several methods and procedures, including correlation analysis, regression analysis, and the Chi-squared test. The last phase of the study included the presentation and discussion of the results.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework shown in [Figure 1](#) was used to identify the dependent and independent variables and their relationship with each other. The research hypotheses and

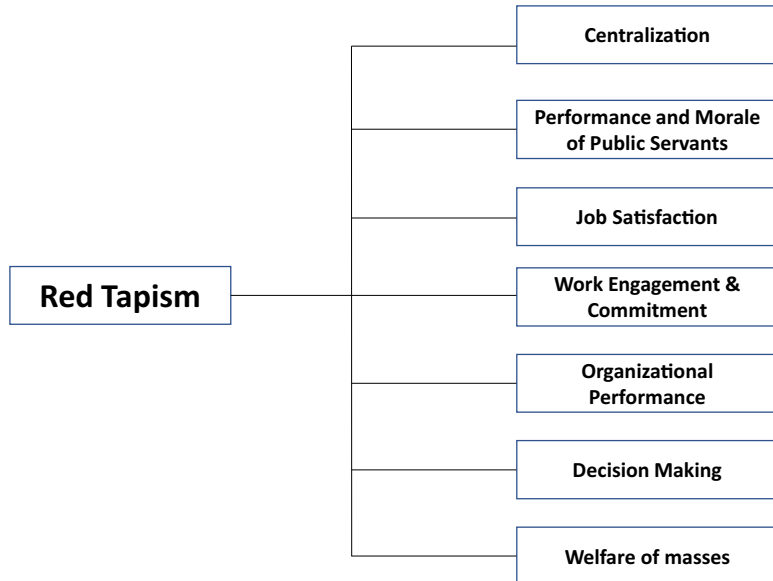


Figure 1.
Conceptual framework

Source: By author (2019)

testable statements are presented in [Table 1](#) to help define the correlations between these variables.

Hypotheses

To understand the current status of red-tapism, employees were asked about their perception of delayed work due to unnecessary rules and regulations. The following hypotheses of employees' perception of red-tapism were tested.

H1. *Red-tapism is a necessary consequence of the bureaucratic process.*

Red-tapism is one of the main aspects of the bureaucratic process. Developing countries seek to emulate the bureaucratic process, which cannot be imposed without the integration of red tape. Thus, red-tapism is one of the initial steps in a country's development of bureaucracy.

H2. *Red-tapism negatively affects employees' commitment, loyalty, performance, and job satisfaction.*

Red tape negatively impacts employee performance. When work tasks are delayed due to an excessiveness of unnecessary rules and regulations, it results in employee burnout, which eventually decreases their commitment to work. Employees'

Dependent variables	Description
Centralization	Most of the public organizations in Pakistan have integrated centralized decision making for years. In centralization, authority and top management have control over all of the decisions made. In this research, centralization is one of the primary dependent variables. This study attempts to investigate the role of centralization within red-tapism.
Performance and morale of public servants	Performance is one of the main elements that cannot be ignored in an organization. Organizations are always in search of employees who can add value to the organizations through effective performance. The element of public servants' morale should also be considered. This research examines how the relationship between public servants' performance and morale is influenced by the high integration of red-tapism.
Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction is the main component that influences whether employees stay with an organization, and it directly and indirectly impacts their job performance. In this research, the relationship between job satisfaction and red tape is investigated.
Work engagement and commitment	Employees' work engagement and commitment is intertwined with the effective accomplishment of organizational goals. When work engagement and loyalty are high, employees' performance will be positively enhanced. This research investigates the impact of the high integration of red-tapism in public organizations on work engagement and commitment.
Organizations' performance	Organizational performance is directly linked to the successful accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives. This research attempts to determine the impact of red-tapism on the performance of government organizations.
Decision making	The impact of red-tapism profoundly influences decision making. Those organizations that have more rules and regulations may take longer to make difficult decisions compared to organizations that have fewer rules and regulations.
Welfare of the masses	This research investigates the influence of red-tapism on the wellbeing of the masses.

Source: By author (2019)

Table 1.
Dependent variables of the study

commitment to their work is interlinked with loyalty, reliability, performance, and job satisfaction. Thus, if the amount of red tape decreases, employee commitment and its related factors will eventually increase.

H3. *Interference of the political sector increases red-tapism in government departments.*

As a developing country, Pakistan’s political situation is continuously changing due to external and internal pressures. The political instability of the country has resulted in governmental officials making all administrative decisions, which directly impacts organizations’ procedures and policies. This political interference in the administrative area has severely affected organizations, especially governmental organizations, by hindering the administrative machinery.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the SPSS software. Correlation and regression analyses and the Chi-squared test were used for the data analysis. Bar charts and tables were created to increase the validation and verification of the data. A correlation table was created to determine whether the hypotheses should be accepted or rejected. Multiple regression models, including ANOVA and standardized coefficients, were also used.

The reliability of the questionnaire is presented in Table 2. The Cronbach’s alpha had a value of .591, which is excellent, and the number of items was 79.

Results

Hypotheses

Regarding H1, the study revealed that there was ambiguity and a lack of consensus among bureaucrats and government officials regarding whether red-tapism is necessary for bureaucracy. An equal number of people agreed, disagreed, and were neutral regarding this question. Based on these results, the author concludes that red-tapism does exist in bureaucracy but is not necessarily a consequence of bureaucracy.

Regarding H2, the data analysis showed that 54 employees agreed, 8 were neutral, and 17 disagreed with the statement that red-tapism negatively affects employee commitment, loyalty, performance, and job satisfaction. Therefore, this hypothesis was accepted. Employees agreed that the high integration of red-tapism in public organizations decreases employee commitment to work, which influences organizations’ goals and profits.

Regarding H3, the study revealed that more than 80% of the respondents felt that the interference of the political sector harmed government departments’ operations and decision making. Political interference has profoundly increased the amount of red tape in the bureaucratic environment of Pakistan, severely affecting governmental organizations.

Correlation and dependence

The first hypothesis about centralization has a correlation coefficient of .385, significance level of .000, and sample size of 121. All these values support this hypothesis. The second hypothesis about the performance and morale of public servants has a correlation coefficient

Reliability Statistics

Table 2.
Reliability scale

Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
.591	79

Correlations

	Centralization	Performance and morale of public servants	Work engagement and commitment	Organization performance	Decision making	Job satisfaction	Red-tapism
Centralization	Pearson Correlation Significance Squared Sum Covariance N	1.000 P < .001 440.562 3.671 121 121 .278**	.278** P < .001 170.629 1.422 121 121 1.000	.237** P < .001 147.665 1.231 121 121 .628**	.236** P < .001 90.882 0.757 121 121 .631**	.236** P < .001 90.882 0.757 121 121 .631**	.385** P < .001 263.102 2.193 121 121 .416**
Performance and morale of public servants	Pearson Correlation Significance Squared Sum Covariance N	.000 170.629 1.422 121 121 .237**	.000 853.379 7.111 121 121 .628**	.000 545.138 4.543 121 121 1.000	.000 70.760 0.590 121 121 .045	.000 338.718 2.823 121 121 .854**	.000 396.605 3.305 121 121 .412**
Work engagement and commitment	Pearson Correlation Significance Squared Sum Covariance N	.000 147.665 1.231 121 121 .236**	.000 545.138 4.543 121 121 .631**	.000 883.302 7.361 121 121 .854**	.000 18.614 0.155 121 121 .134	.000 466.153 3.885 121 121 1.000**	.000 399.233 3.327 121 121 .429**
Organization performance	Pearson Correlation Significance Squared Sum Covariance N	.000 90.882 0.757 121 121 .176	.000 338.718 2.823 121 121 .172	.000 466.153 3.885 121 121 .045	.000 34.624 0.289 121 121 1.000	.000 337.612 2.813 121 121 .134	.000 256.764 2.140 121 121 .320**
Decision making	Pearson Correlation Significance Squared Sum Covariance N	.000 52.017 0.433 121 121	.000 70.760 0.590 121 121	.000 18.614 0.155 121 121	.000 197.471 1.646 121 121	.000 34.624 0.289 121 121	.000 146.405 1.220 121 121

Table 3. Correlation and dependence

of .416, significance of .000, and sample size of 121. The third hypothesis about work engagement and commitment has a correlation coefficient of .412 and significance level of .000. The fourth hypothesis about organizations' performance has a correlation coefficient of .429 and significance level of .000. The fifth hypothesis about decision making has a correlation coefficient of .320 and significance level of .000. The sixth hypothesis about job

Model	Variables Entered/Removed		Method
	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	
1	Job satisfaction, decision making, centralization, performance and morale of public servants, work engagement and commitment	-	Enter

a. Tolerance level = .000 limits reached
b. Dependent variable: red-tapism

Table 4.
Regression analysis

Model	Model Summary			
	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.582	.339	.310	2.47137

a. Predictors (constant): job satisfaction, decision making, centralization, performance and morale of public servants, work engagement and commitment

Table 5.
Summary of the model

Model		ANOVA			F	Sig.
		Sum of Squares	df	Means Square		
1	Regression	360.325	5	72.065	11.799	.000 α
	Residual	720.381	115	6.108		
	Total	1062.706	120			

a. Predictors (constant): job satisfaction, decision making, centralization, performance and morale of public servants, work engagement and commitment
b. Dependent variable: red-tapism

Table 6.
ANOVA

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.317	1.016		2.281	.000
	Centralization	0.374	0.124	-.241	3.007	.000
	Performance and morale of public servants	0.150	0.114	-.134	1.313	.000
	Work engagement and commitment	0.169	0.166	.154	1.014	.000
	Decision making	0.534	0.183	.230	2.921	.000
	Job satisfaction	0.222	0.269	.125	0.826	.000

a. Dependent variable: red-tapism

Table 7.
Coefficients

satisfaction has a correlation coefficient of .429 and significance level of .000. The results support all these values.

In the model summary table (Table 5), the value of $R = .582$, $R^2 = .339$, and adjusted $R^2 = .310$. All these figures are in favor of the hypotheses of the research.

The ANOVA table (Table 6) is divided into two main aspects, regression and residual, and the value of the sum of squares = 360.325, degree of freedom = 5, mean square = 72.065, and frequency = 11.799 with a significance level = .000. The value of frequency F shows the variance in the conceptual framework model.

The coefficients table (Table 7) is divided into two main aspects, unstandardized and standardized coefficients. The independent variable is red-tapism, and dependent variables are centralization, performance and morale of public servants, work engagement and commitment, decision making, and job satisfaction. The beta value for the performance and morale of civil servants (-.134) indicates that this dependent variable is the best predictor of the model. The second-best predictor is centralization (-.241).

Discussion and conclusion

The variables were used to test all three hypotheses and answer the research questions posed in this study. The discussion below offers suggestions for specific areas of improvement in the bureaucratic system of Punjab.

One limitation that the author faced was that some bureaucrats were reluctant to provide proper support or assistance due to certain administrative restrictions. Hence, the responses do not reflect the opinions of the entire population. Further, the author could not reach a specific conclusion as to the impact of each factor on the role of bureaucracy in Pakistan. This research can thus only conclude that a relationship exists, but the extent of the involvement of red tape is unclear.

Based on the above statistical analysis, it can be concluded that the high integration of red tape has weakened the performance of public sector organizations in Punjab and the overall economy of the country. The analysis revealed that the use of red tape is high in Punjab. Red tape plays a negative role in organizational performance by directly and indirectly affecting employee behavior. It was also observed that the government is trying to privatize governmental organizations to reduce the amount of red tape. Red tape has increased drastically in public sector organizations in the last few decades, but unfortunately, no measures have been taken to reduce or eliminate it.

The rationale behind the existence of red tape in organizations is to enact legal control, but this has not worked according to plan. Some employees in public departments have indulged in fraudulent and corrupt practices, and as a result, bribery has occurred. People who bribe government officials are given higher priority to get their issues resolved. The findings indicate that red tape has a negative impact on the overall organizational performance. It may also cause employees to search for other jobs and leave the organization.

The results showed that employees' job satisfaction decreases when there is intense red-tapism integrated into organizations. The main reason for this is that employees are prevented from completing their job duties due to delays caused by red tape. This can be frustrating for employees and makes them feel disappointed with and disengaged from their work. This not only creates a hassle for the public by preventing them from receiving services but also for employees, who may feel that the whole process of their work is meaningless.

Employee motivation is critical for organizations to accomplish their goals and objectives, thus influencing organizational productivity. Employee motivation is the primary tool for organizations' success, but in the case of the public sector of Pakistan, the level of employee motivation is very low. This motivation level can be enhanced when employees feel engaged with their work and are able to complete their work on time, which in turn helps the

organization to accomplish its goals. In public sector organizations of Pakistan, the aspect of red tape delays the execution of jobs/tasks, resulting in decreased employee motivation. This is harmful for organizations, as employees then lose interest in the job.

Employees' level of motivation is directly linked with their work commitment. The results of this study revealed that public servants have low motivation levels as a result of poor work commitment. In simple terms, when motivation decreases, the work commitment also gradually decreases. The main reason for low motivation is employees' work being delayed due to an excessiveness of rules and regulations. When employees have poor work commitment, they will not take the initiative to improve their work or to achieve the desired level of commitment.

The research results indicate that the integration of red tape not only impacts employees' behavior and attitudes but also organizations' performance. The analysis revealed that government organizations have not been able to accomplish their target goals and aims due to the aspect of red tape, which overall results in weakening the economy.

Recommendations

The government of Punjab should take measures to remove or at least reduce the negative impact of red tape so that government organizations can add value to the economy. The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Organizational processes should be reviewed, and the steps and procedures required to perform a task should be recorded as standard operating procedures, which are convenient for employees to carry out their tasks and recognize the output of their efforts.
2. Motivational seminars and workshops should be arranged at various levels to develop understanding and coordination among different ministries. Organizational leaders and employees should stay motivated and focused on delivering honest and dedicated services to the organization and the public.
3. Government departments should organize more exchange programs for their employees to develop and promote inter-agency understanding and create national integration of more effective process re-engineering required for to reduce the negative impacts of red tape.
4. A committee at the provincial level should review and track ongoing projects/tasks and measure organizational output every quarter. Projects that are stuck at any level within an organization can be revisited, which will improve organizational performance.
5. Training of public servants should be conducted yearly to address their motivational, operational, or work environment-related issues.
6. Coaching and training programs for employees working in public organizations should be conducted to keep them involved in overall organizational output and to make them understand how their motivation level affects the economy. This will hopefully result in positive employee behaviors.
7. Most importantly, because planning is weak in provincial public organizations, projects and schemes can get stuck unfinished. This should be addressed so that all the issues are removed during the initial planning stage.

To sum up, red tape cannot be eliminated immediately from traditional public organizations in Pakistan. However, many steps can be taken to reduce it from the system and to address

the negative consequences of red tape on employees. This can help improve the overall performance of public sector organizations.

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