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**Wasteful management practices as perceived by the supportive staff  
of University of Gondar: Lessons for private higher education  
institutions in Ethiopia**

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***Abstract:***

*Managers are concerned about the effects of leaderships on organization, achievement of objectives and quality of their leadership. Even though many managers feel that they are promoting the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs), unproductive management practices, which do not contribute to the achievement of objectives and failure to recognize and control them by leaders, are common. The purpose of this study was to assess the perception of administrative staff of University of Gondar about the manifestation of these Wasteful Management Practices (WMPs), using ten dimensions such as organizational politics, hypocrisy and so on.*

*The data were collected from 77 employees working in Human Resource, Finance and Registrar of the university. To measure Wasteful Management Practices, an instrument consisting 30 items was developed from literature. The validity and reliability of this instrument was tested by using Factor Analysis and Cronbach' Alpha respectively.*

*The finding of this study shows that Wasteful Management Practices are rampant (67.43 %). The most dominant waste or unproductive practices of the university are: delay of tasks that require immediate actions (Procrastination); a delay between the making and implementation of a decision (Time Lag); execute things as a matter of tradition (Habit); failure to know every detail about every activity and pass a decision with uncertainty (Individual Limitation); and attend too many and unplanned meetings (Unproductive Meeting).*

*This study was conducted in public university; but the problem tried to*

*address wasteful management practices and its implications are also the concern of Private Universities, other governmental and nongovernmental organizations. In the majority of the organizations, management activities, which do not contribute to the achievement of organization's objectives, are taken for granted as a normal feature of organizational life are common. This study is a wakeup call for all.*

**Keywords:** wasteful, management practices, wasteful management practices

## **1. Introduction**

Wasteful management practices, which don't contribute to the fulfillment of organizational objectives, are rampant in many public organizations (Gupta, 1992). Such practices are occurring slowly and silently and are unproductive. Mostly leaders fail to recognize and control them (Ibid). Even leaders of most successful organizations are not aware of the existence of such wasteful practices. As employees in organizations work most closely with their bosses; they are directly or indirectly affected by such unproductive and wasteful management practices of their superiors.

Few researches tried to address the issue of *wasteful management practices* and the potential negative effects of such practices on the organization. Traditionally, leadership research focuses on factors associated with effective leadership, often with an implicit assumption that ineffective leadership simply reflects the absence of leadership (Ashforth, 1994). More research has investigated constructive, effective or successful leadership (Kelloway, Mullen, & Francis, 2006). Much research has been done about antecedents' and consequences of bad leadership, the effects of leaders' behaviors and leadership styles. There is a growing body of literature that describes how good leadership practices and happy employees contribute to the overall success of an organization; but little academic and empirical research is done about the extent and effect of leader's *wasteful Management practices*.

The purpose of this paper is twofold:(1) to propose proper dimensions of *wasteful management practices* that capture the different aspects of wasteful or unproductive activities, and (2) to contribute to a more nuanced concept of *wasteful management practices* by arguing that most leaders practices are unknowingly bringing counterproductive activities. Hence, this study is conducted to assess the magnitude of leaders' *wasteful management practices* as perceived by supporting staff of the University of Gondar.

## **2. Objective of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to assess the extent of leaders' *wasteful management practices* as perceived by employees.

The specific objectives are:

- To investigate the extent of wasteful management practices in the university in terms of organizational politics, confusing messages, unproductive meetings, hypocrisy, procrastination, doing subordinate's work, developing few inner circle ignoring the rest, individual limitation, time lag and habit
- To assess employees' perception level base on their demographic variables, and
- To provide suggestions for a wakeup call for leaders

## **3. Research Questions**

This study addresses the following questions:

- What is the extent of wasteful management practices as perceived by supportive staff in the university?
- Is there a difference in their perception based on employees' demographics?

## **4. Literature Review**

### **4.1. Definition of Wasteful Management Practice**

According to Donovan, (n.d.) the term “Waste” means to expend uselessly; to squander; to neglect. “Practice” – performance or execution, as opposed to theory; custom or habit. Placing these terms together gives *wasteful practices* which means to habitually squander or neglect. In terms of organizational operations, wasteful practices occur so frequently that leaders become blind to them. These *wasteful management practices* are become “custom or habit” (Ibid).

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, *wasteful management practices* is defined as a collection of unproductive small practices, which do not contribute to the achievement of organization’s objectives that people fail to recognize and control them. Hence, in this study, *wasteful management practices* is treated in terms of organizational politics, confusing message, unproductive meetings, hypocrisy, procrastination, doing subordinate's work, developing few inner circle ignoring the rest, individual limitation, time lag and habit. These dimensions are the most common counterproductive or wasteful practices that have crept into an organization and come as part of its normal operations. These counterproductive practices or demodulators exist because they are allowed to and they remain because little has been done about them (Gupta, 1992).

#### **4.2. Dimensions of Wasteful Management Practice**

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are a good collection of small efforts that a leader should follow to the best of his ability. Each practice will take only a small investment in time and/or money to implement it (<http://www.pprc.org>). However, in the majority of organizations management practices, which do not contribute to the achievement of organization’s objectives, are common. Such practices are wasteful. But people fail to recognize and control them. Quite often these practices are taken for granted as a normal feature of organizational life (Gupta, 1992). These wasteful practices in work places are briefly presented below:

**a) Organizational Politics:** *Organizational politics* is actions by individuals, which are directed toward the goal of furthering their own

self-interests without regard for the well-being of others or their organization (Kacmar & Baron, 1999). Organizational politics is usually defined as behavior strategically designed to maximize self-interests and therefore contradicts the collective organizational goals or the interests of other individuals (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). This behavior was frequently associated with manipulation, defamation, subversiveness and illegitimate ways of overusing power to attain one's objectives (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Organizational politics is a general method for getting things and using power for personal gain in an organization (Barton, et al., 1999). It usually operates according to unwritten rules of success that send subtle, ambiguous and anxiety-producing messages to employees about politically "correct" behaviors such as whom to fear, whom to appraise, whom to avoid, whom to blame (Ibid).

Organizational politics play a prominent role and is likely to influence several important work-related attitudes and behaviors (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). For example, employees are too scared to go against their own bosses, even when they know that their bosses are wrong, and they have feasible and sometimes brilliant ideas to improve productivity. This is why there is no innovation and the status quos remains for years, characterized by inefficient and ineffective productivity (Barton et al., 1999).

Ferris et al. (1989) also argued that when employees perceive high levels of organizational politics and feel that they have little control over these organizational processes, organizational politics will likely be perceived as a threat. The basic cause of wasteful management practice is that individuals tend to pursue their own personal objectives without contributing to organizational goals (Gupta, 1992).

**b) Confusing messages:** Managers must hold nothing back of interest to employees except those very few items that are absolutely confidential. But in reality, one of the most counterproductive rules in organizations is distributing information selectively and making their expectations unknown. This creates a huge gap. Workers' get frustrated with the absence of adequate communication (Barton et al., 1999). The problem

with confusing messages is that after a while, workers realize that when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority; they waste large amount of energy and time working on the wrong task, accomplishing the wrong results, and becoming extremely frustrated in the processes and being de-motivated (Ibid).

**c) Unproductive meeting:** Meetings are vital to corporate success and no one is against them. But in reality most practices show that managers in organizations attend too many meetings weekly which sometimes become a reason for resentment in the part of the managers as well as employees (Hackman & Johensin, 2004). Meetings provide a controlling factor in achieving the organizational objectives. But they can be major wasteful management practices when the attendees have nothing except being a part in the room to listen the leader on what he wants, and does not want any feedback or opinion. Most meetings are poorly planned and ineptly led- anyone with responsible must make meeting short and satisfying (Ibid)

**d) Hypocrisy:** Hypocrites are people who publicly uphold strict moral norms; expecting and demanding others to follow them, but who privately violate these espoused standards in their own behavior (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007; Lammers, et al., 2010). Hypocrisy is the discrepancy between what respondents think is normative and how they actually behave. The discrepancy between what respondents believe other people should do and what they actually would do themselves in such a situation (Batson & Thompson, 2001).

**e) Procrastination:** Another common source of waste stems from delaying work which is unpleasant by finding distractions which are less important or unproductive. Procrastination occurs when you put off tasks that you should be focusing on right now. When one procrastinates, he feels guilty that he hasn't started; he comes to dread doing the task; and, eventually, everything catches up with him when he fails to complete the work on time (Blair, 1996).

**f) Doing Subordinate's work:** This is what merely inappropriate wasteful practice means. Often most leaders do the job themselves, a

task which would have been done by a subordinate. Rather than training the subordinates to do it and budgeting some time on monitoring the task thereafter, they prefer to do it themselves (Ibid).

**g) Developing inner circles of few and ignoring the rest:** The strength of the management staff will determine the fate of the organization's success. Management and leadership are all about people and relationships. Most leaders categorized employees into two groups: leaders establish a special exchange with a small group of subordinates "In-group" who function as assistants or advisors is characterized by high interaction, mutual trust, formal and informal reward. The exchange relationship with the remaining majority employees, "out-group", characterized by low trust, interaction and support and more use of formal authority. Low level of mutual influence only comply with formal role requirements only (e.g., duties, standard procedures, legitimate direction) (Graen, 1976).

**h) Individual limitation:** In larger and complex organization, an individual cannot know every detail about every activity. One has to make decision without complete knowledge and under uncertainty. As a result, resources are not put to the highest efficiency (Gupta, 1992).

**i) Time lag:** There is often a delay between the making and implementation of a decision. Some of the necessary resources are likely to be ready before others. Therefore, the resources which are ready earlier will have to wait. Such ideal resource represents wasteful organizational practice (Gupta, 1992).

**j) Habit:** Many things are done in organizations as a matter of habit or traditions. Rigid policies, procedures and rules obviously aggravate this problem. There is a tendency to believe that 'whatever is right'. Such view leads to waste in organizational resources. All these elements are treated as dimensions of *wasteful management practices*.

## **5. Methods of Study**



The population of the study is 195, the total supporting staff of University of Gondar, particularly working in Human Resource, Finance and Registrar excluding office boys and Janitors. To assess leaders' wasteful management practices a sample of 120 was selected randomly and questionnaires were distributed. But only 77 usable questionnaires were collected.

To measure "*wasteful management practices*", an instrument is developed from literatures (Gupta, 1992; Parkinson, 1957; Barton, et al., 1999; Hackman & Johensin, 2004). The instrument had 30 items. The ten dimensions of the variables had 2-6 items each. The items were presented to the respondents as a statement to which they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree/disagree along a five-point Likert response scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). For the sake of analysis strongly disagree and disagree as well as strongly agree and agree were combined.

The validity of the instrument was tested by means of Factor Analysis. The 30 items of the wasteful management practices scale were also subjected to an exploratory factor analysis using Principal Component's analysis with a Varimax rotation and selection criteria of Eigen values greater than 1.0. Nine factors emerged which almost accounted for 75.3 percent of the variance. The Eigen value for the first component (8.503) accounted for 28.34 percent; the Eigen value for the second component explained (2.829) percent of the variability in the original nine variables.

The reliability of the instrument was also tested using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is used as a test of internal consistency, to determine if all the items within the instrument measure the same thing. The result of the reliability test of *wasteful organizational practice* on 30 items instrument is found to be 0.905

## **6. The Study Findings**

### **6.1. Extent of Wasteful Management Practices**

Table 1 below shows the extent of wasteful management practices in total and by each dimension. Accordingly 67.43 percent of supporting staff members perceived that wasteful management practices in the university were rampant. Regarding the dimensions of wasteful management practices, respondents rated the frequency distribution percentage as follows: procrastination and time lag (80.5%) each; habit (76.6); individual limitation (72.05% ); unproductive meeting (68.8); inner circle (65.55); organizational politics (60.7); doing subordinate's work (57.75 ) ; hypocrisy (57.12 ) and confusing message (54.76 ).As it is clearly shown in the Table, almost more than half (55 percent - 81 percent) of employees perceived the manifestation of all the ten dimensions or elements of wasteful management practices.

According to these findings, the most perceived and dominant wastes or unproductive practices of the university are: delay of tasks that would have been executed right now (procrastination); delay between the making and implementation of a decision (time lag); performing things as a matter of traditions (habit); failure to know every detail about every activity and making decision with uncertainty (individual limitation); attending too many and unplanned meetings weekly (unproductive meetings).

*Table 1: Frequency distribution of extent of wasteful management practices*

		Disagree		Nether disagree nor agree		Agree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Organizational Politics	12	15.9	18	23.4	47	60.7
2	Confusing Message	22	28.8	13	16.4	42	54.76
3	Unproductive Meeting	13	16.9	11	14.3	53	68.8
4	Hypocrisy	14	19.8	18	23.0	44	57.12
5	Procrastination	10	12.3	6	7.15	62	80.5
6	Doing	24	30.5	9	11.7	45	57.75

	Subordinate's Work						
7	Inner circle	11	13.7	16	20.8	51	65.55
8	Individual Limitation	11	13.7	11	14.3	56	72.05
9	Time Lag	10	12.3	6	7.15	62	80.5
10	Habit	10	11	10	12.3 5	59	76.6
<b>Total Wasteful Management Practices</b>		13	17.4 9	12	15.0 68	52	<b>67.43</b>

## 6.2. Findings by respondents' demographic

In this assessment, 30(39%) female and 47(61%) male employees participated. The educational backgrounds of these participants were masters 4(5.2%), undergraduate degree 56 (72.7%); diploma 15 (19.5%); and 12<sup>th</sup> grade complete 2(2.6%).

As Table 2 shows, 60 percent of female and 72 percent of male respondents perceived that wasteful management practices is rampant in the university. Moreover, 81 percent of second degree holders, 64 percent of undergraduates, and 62 percent of diploma holders agreed about the existence of wasteful management practices.

*Table 2: Frequency distribution of wasteful management practices based on respondents demographics*

		<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Agree</b>
		%	%	%
Gender	Female	24	16	60
	Male	13	15	72
Education	12 <sup>th</sup>	29	23	42
	Diploma	23	14	62
	First Degree	12	13	64
	2nd Degree	08	16	81

## 7. Conclusion

In most organizations, there are too many wasteful activities that are taken for granted. Most leaders perform them unknowingly. In order to

exercise best management practices and avoid these counterproductive practices, people have to be conscious and sharpen their saw.

The variety of concepts and behavioral descriptions falling under the overarching concept of wasteful management practices of leaders have to be expanded significantly. Extensive literature is not available on the issue. With these limitations in mind, some dimensions, which reflect various aspects of *wasteful management practices*, are proposed by this study. First, the proposed dimensions might contribute to the concept of *wasteful management practices* by offering a broad and inclusive concept of unproductive practices, including behaviors directed both towards subordinates and the larger organization. Second, the proposed dimensions present a nuanced picture of *wasteful management practice*, pointing out the activities that managers practice them unknowingly. Even though further research is required to have a broader picture of the issue, the findings of this mini empirical assessment is a wakeup call for leaders of all sorts of organizations to be aware these crucial problems of leadership.

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