

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Model of Employee Pathology in the Public Sector Due to Political Appointments: Development and Qualitative Validation Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

 Ali Parvin¹,
  Behzad Souki^{*2},
  Tohfeh Ghobadi Lemooki³,
  Kambiz Hamidi⁴

1. Ph.D. Student, Department of Management, Ha.C., Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Kan.C., Islamic Azad University, Kangavar, Iran.

3. Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Ha.C., Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran.

4. Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Ha.C., Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran..

***Correspondence**

Behzad Souki

E-mail: Beh.Souki@iau.ac.ir

Receive Date: 08/Oct/2025

Revise Date: 21/Nov/2025

Accept Date: 02/Dec/2025

How to cite

Parvin, A., Souki, B., Ghobadi Lemooki, T., & Hamidi, K. (2026). A Model of Employee Pathology in the Public Sector Due to Political Appointments: Development and Qualitative Validation Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) *Public Organization Management*, -(-), 1-13.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Introduction**

The current research is based on the assumption that political appointments in the Iranian public sector are phenomena beyond a managerial challenge and result in the systematic erosion of human capital. The main problem of the research is the existence of an analytical gap in the existing literature; previous research has mainly described the correlation between variables, but it has remained silent in explaining “the underlying process” through which an organizational event (political appointment) turns into a multidimensional pathologic cascade at the personal level. Accordingly, the main aim of this research is to fill this gap by designing and validating a “human-centered process Pattern” for the pathology of this phenomenon.

Theoretical Foundations**1. Political Appointments**

Political appointments refer to the process by which the selection and appointment of individuals to public positions, especially in the middle and technical levels, takes precedence over technical competence and professional competence based on political criteria such as party loyalty, factional affiliation, or personal relationships (Peters & Pierre, 2020; Gallo & Lewis, 2022). Political control and agency theory introduces this action as a rational tool by politicians (the employer) to align the bureaucracy and manage the risks of information asymmetry and conflicts of interest with bureaucrats (agents) (Eisenhardt, 1989; Peters & Pierre, 2019). Network theories and social capital have revealed the practical mechanism of these choices and show how informal relationships and networks based on ethno-factional trust block the path to merit (Burt, 2005). Finally, institutional theory seeks the most fundamental cause in the conflict between “political logic” (based on power and loyalty) and “professional logic” (based on expertise) (North, 1990; Friedland & Alford, 1991).

2. Transition from Organizational Analysis to Person-Centered Pathology

Pathology focuses on explaining the “causes and ways” of injury formation (Scott & Davis, 2016). Classical Patterns of organizational pathology (such as those of Nadler-Tashman, Weisbord, or Techie) are fundamentally “organization-centered” and are powerful at detecting macro disorders (such as lack of coherence of structure and strategy) (Rahimi, 2020), but they are facing a serious analytical gap in explaining how a particular employee personally “experiences” these disorders and how this experience “is narrated” in the form of biopsychosocial suffering.

Personal vulnerabilities can be classified into three main categories: (1) psychological vulnerability, (2) social vulnerability, and (3) physical (biological) vulnerability.

3. Processing Pathology Narrative: From Perception to Incarnation

By combining the above theories, pathos can be narrated not as an event, but as a multi-stage process that transforms an organizational phenomenon into an individual debilitating