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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Investigating The Phenomenon of Human Resource Polarization in Administrative Organizations

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EXTENDED A B S T R A C T

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of organizational management, the internal dynamics of the workforce are increasingly mirroring the fractured nature of the broader societal fabric. We are witnessing a paradigm shift where traditional workplace conflict often task-oriented and potentially constructive is being supplanted by a more malignant phenomenon: Human Resource Polarization. Unlike routine disagreements regarding strategy or resource allocation, polarization in administrative organizations involves the calcification of the workforce into distinct, often hostile, camps defined by ideological, cultural, or social identities. This phenomenon is particularly acute in administrative and public sector organizations, where bureaucratic rigidities, hierarchical power structures, and proximity to political discourse can act as accelerants for division.

The problem addressed in this study is not merely the existence of diversity, but the mismanagement of it, leading to "affective polarization." This occurs when professional disagreements devolve into emotional animosity, characterized by a distinct "us versus them" mentality. In administrative settings, this often manifests as a schism between traditionalists and reformists, or between groups aligned with differing external political narratives. The theoretical urgency of this research stems from the concept of "False Polarization" a cognitive bias where employees overestimate the extremism of their colleagues' views, thereby creating chasm-like divisions based on perceived, rather than actual, differences. This "illusion of extreme conflict" leads to organizational silence, reduced knowledge sharing, and a breakdown in the social contract of the workplace.

Despite the growing prevalence of this issue, the existing literature remains fragmented. Studies in political science address societal polarization, while management literature focuses on general conflict resolution. There is a significant paucity of research that integrates these domains to explore how polarization specifically manifests within the structural constraints of administrative organizations. Consequently, this study aims to bridge this gap by identifying, classifying, and analyzing the drivers, consequences, and mitigation strategies of HR polarization. By adopting a meta-synthetic approach, this research seeks to provide a unified theoretical framework that empowers HR leaders to navigate the complexities of a divided workforce, moving beyond simple conflict management toward a strategy of organizational cohesion and pluralism.

Methodology

To achieve a holistic understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon, this study employs a Qualitative Meta-Synthesis approach. Meta-synthesis is chosen for its capacity to integrate and interpret findings from disparate qualitative studies, allowing for the construction of a new, comprehensive interpretive framework that surpasses the insights of any single study.

The research protocol follows the seven-step model proposed by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007), ensuring a rigorous and systematic process:

1. Formulation of Research Questions: The study was guided by three central inquiries: What are the antecedents of HR polarization? What are its organizational and individual consequences? What strategic interventions can mitigate its effects?

2. Systematic Literature Search: A comprehensive search was conducted across major academic databases, including *ScienceDirect*, *Google Scholar*, *Sage*, and *Emerald*. The search parameters encompassed the time frame from 1996 to 2025, utilizing keywords such as "polarized workforce," "ideological conflict in organizations," "workplace polarization," and "affective polarization in HR."

3. Screening and Selection (PRISMA): The search initially yielded 592 potential sources. A multi-stage screening process based on the PRISMA protocol was utilized. After removing duplicates and screening titles/abstracts for relevance to the administrative/organizational context, the remaining full texts were assessed.

4. Quality Appraisal: To ensure the validity of the synthesis, the CASP (Critical Skills Appraisal Program) checklist was applied to the remaining qualitative studies. Only studies meeting the threshold for methodological rigor were retained.

6. Data Extraction and Synthesis: Ultimately, 19 high-quality studies (articles and books) were selected for the final analysis.

7. Coding: Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. The researchers employed open coding to identify units of meaning, which were then grouped into sub-themes and main categories. To ensure reliability, a Test-Retest Reliability method was employed, where the coding process was repeated after a one-month interval, yielding a reliability coefficient (percentage agreement) of 88.23%, which indicates a high level of consistency.

Findings

The meta-synthesis resulted in the extraction of 34 distinct codes, which were clustered into three overarching categories: (1) Drivers and Antecedents, (2) Consequences, and (3) Mitigation Strategies.

1. Drivers of Polarization (The Roots of Division): The analysis revealed that polarization is not mono-causal but stems from a convergence of psychological, structural, and social factors.

• **Psychological/Cognitive Factors:** A primary driver is "False Polarization" and cognitive distortion. The findings highlight that employees often harbor inaccurate "second-order beliefs" (meta-perceptions)—erroneously believing that members of the "out-group" hold hostile views toward them. This creates a feedback loop of defensive aggression. Furthermore, "Group Polarization" theory was evident, where group discussions tend to push individuals toward more extreme positions than they held originally.

• **Organizational/Structural Factors:** In administrative organizations, rigid hierarchical structures and perceived injustice in resource allocation were found to be significant catalysts. When decision-making is opaque and top-down, employees retreat into subgroups for protection, fostering an "us vs. them" dynamic. Task conflicts, when unresolved, rapidly metastasize into relationship conflicts, cementing polarization.

• **Socio-Cultural Factors:** The spillover of external societal and political ideologies into the workplace is a critical factor. The formation of "Echo Chambers" or closed information loops within departments ensures that employees are only exposed to validating viewpoints, deepening the ideological divide.

2. Consequences of Polarization (The Organizational Cost): The impact of polarization was found to be pervasive and deleterious.

- **Individual & Team Level:** At the micro-level, polarization leads to social fragmentation. It erodes trust, increases stress, and fosters a culture of avoidance where employees refuse to interact with colleagues from the "opposing" camp. This leads to "Epistemic Closure," where teams reject valid information simply because it originates from an out-group source.

- **Organizational Level:** At the macro-level, the consequences include strategic paralysis and gridlock. Decision-making slows down as every initiative is viewed through an ideological lens. The study also identified a direct correlation between high polarization and increased turnover rates, particularly among talent who feel alienated by the toxic culture. Furthermore, it results in the sub-optimization of human capital, as collaboration across functional silos becomes impossible.

3. Management Strategies (The Path Forward): The synthesis identified a portfolio of interventions required to de-escalate polarization.

- **Cognitive & Educational:** Organizations must implement training focused on "Cognitive Debiasing". This involves exposing the mechanisms of false polarization to employees, helping them realize that the "other side" is less extreme than they imagine. Developing skills for "difficult conversations" is also crucial.

- **Structural Interventions:** Breaking down silos is essential. The creation of cross-functional task forces that force interaction between disparate groups can humanize the "other" and reduce affective polarization through the "Contact Hypothesis."

- **Leadership Dynamics:** The findings emphasize the need for "Inclusive Leadership". Leaders must transition from authoritarian styles to empathetic approaches that validate different perspectives without endorsing toxicity. Creating "psychologically safe spaces" where diverse viewpoints can be aired without fear of retribution is a critical leadership competency.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study characterizes Human Resource Polarization as a central strategic challenge that threatens the core of administrative viability, transcending mere behavioral conflict. The findings reveal that polarization stems from a toxic convergence of ideological divergence, social identity conflicts, and rigid bureaucratic structures, resulting in the "balkanization" of the workforce. Left unchecked, this phenomenon corrodes the psychological contract, diminishes productivity, and accelerates turnover by fostering an environment of distrust. However, the research identifies a critical paradox: while affective polarization is destructive, the underlying diversity of thought remains a vital asset for innovation. The managerial imperative, therefore, is to decouple ideological diversity from emotional hostility, constructing a "containment architecture" that permits disagreement without division.

To achieve this, a tripartite intervention strategy is proposed. At the organizational level, policies must institutionalize psychological safety and cognitive de-biasing to neutralize prejudices before they calcify. Structurally, administrative silos must be dismantled through cross-functional interdependence, utilizing the "Contact Hypothesis" to foster empathy through shared goals. Finally, leadership acts as the linchpin; the era of distant administration must yield to empathetic, participatory leadership capable of navigating complex identity politics. Ultimately, mitigating polarization requires a holistic ecosystem approach integrating inclusive policies, permeable structures, and human-centric leadership to transform the volatile energy of conflict into the synergy of cooperative organizational performance.

KEYWORDS

Human Resource Polarization, Administrative Organizations, Meta-Synthesis, False Polarization, Organizational Conflict, Inclusive Leadership, Workforce Dynamics, Affective Polarization.

