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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Presentation and Analysis of the Sanctuary Selection in Managerial Structures: Causes and Factors for the Selection of Less Competent Managers in Lower Organizational Levels

Nabi Omidi* 

Associate Professor,
Department of Management,
Payame Noor University,
Tehran, Iran.

*Correspondence

Nabi Omidi
E-mail: nabiomidi@pnu.ac.ir

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

A troubling phenomenon can be observed within the managerial structures of organizations, which can be described as Sanctuary Selection. This concept refers to a conscious decision by upper-level managers to appoint weak, unskilled, and low-impact individuals to lower-level managerial positions, rather than selecting competent and capable candidates. Scholars in the fields of management, organizational studies, and organizational behavior have explored various concepts to investigate the multifaceted motives and consequences of such ineffective appointments. These concepts include the Principle of the Small Man, Spider Management, Dwarf-Breeding, Nepotism, the Mensani Effect, the Tall Poppy Syndrome, Distributed Incompetence, Elite Suppression, Talent Suffocation, and Incompetence-Based Selection, each of which explains a particular angle of this phenomenon. A review of the literature associated with each of these concepts reveals underlying causes and reasons for such behavior, and it appears that in all of them, there are traces of a “sanctuary” being created by managers who engage in these types of selections. Regarding the research terminology, although the concept of “Sanctuary Selection” overlaps with similar notions like Spider Management and Dwarf-Breeding, it possesses a key and pivotal difference in terms of the manager’s inner motivation and strategic intent. While Dwarf-Breeding is predominantly a reactive action to eliminate elites and rivals after their appointment or during a direct competitive process (with the sole aim of divesting capable individuals of power) Sanctuary Selection is a preventive strategy. The creation of this sanctuary is not necessarily limited to the organizational interests of the workplace; it may extend to other dimensions, including social, political, security, foresight, and economic considerations. In this research, by introducing the concept of “Sanctuary Selection,” we endeavor to provide a comprehensive and holistic framework for understanding the causes and factors behind the selection of weak managers in lower organizational tiers by senior managers and power entities (political, institutional, executive). These selections are often made for reasons such as reducing perceived threats to one’s current position, consolidating a personal power network, and avoiding managerial challenges. The outcome of such a process is a sharp decline in organizational efficiency and effectiveness, increased dissatisfaction among specialized human resources, and the formation of an atmosphere of hopelessness among employees. This flawed pattern, introduced and presented in this study as “Sanctuary Selection,” functions as a conservative reaction by managers to potential future threats. The central research question is why and how these types of selections become an unwritten rule in some organizations, and what organizational, psychological, or cultural factors contribute to the perpetuation of this trend. What

fundamentally distinguishes this research from other studies is its presentation and explanation of the innovative concept of “Sanctuary Selection.” While concepts such as Spider Management focus on networking for control, Dwarf-Breeding on the suppression of elites, and Incompetence-Based Selection on the output and results of the system, the concept of “Sanctuary Selection” addresses the conscious and strategic action of a manager to reduce perceived threats and establish psychological security. This concept considers the selection of weak individuals not as an unintended consequence but as a psychological defense mechanism and a preventive survival strategy. Unlike other concepts that are largely descriptive, “Sanctuary Selection” offers an explanatory-analytical framework that focuses on the motivation and mental logic of the superior manager. By linking this behavior to theories such as Resource Dependency Theory, in which a manager views their position as a scarce resource, and Symbolic Interactionism Theory, which regards job security as a mental construct, this research attempts to explore deeper layers of this phenomenon that have been less addressed in the existing literature.

Methodology

This research was designed and executed as a quantitative study with an applied-developmental approach, based on a cross-sectional survey design. The research instrument was developed following an extensive review of theoretical literature and previous research, which allowed for the identification of the key dimensions of the variables. Research data were collected using a survey method via a questionnaire. Data analysis was primarily conducted using SPSS software, and for supplementary analyses and structural equation modeling, LISREL software was employed. The statistical population of the research consisted of 397 individuals, including managers and experts from public sector organizations, senior and middle-level managers, and university professors specializing in organizational and management studies. Due to access limitations and the necessity of selecting samples relevant to the topic, a purposive convenience sampling method was used. This means that individuals who matched the research criteria and were accessible to the researchers were selected as the sample. Ultimately, a total of 196 individuals were surveyed, from which 174 completed the questionnaires fully, and their data were included in the analyses. The data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire comprising 51 items, designed based on a review of literature and theoretical sources. To assess the normality of the data distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was administered, the results of which indicated a normal distribution of the statistical population. Furthermore, to examine the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated. The value obtained for all items was above 0.8, indicating the desirable reliability of the questionnaire. The validity of the questionnaire was also ensured through an initial screening and confirmation of face validity with the help of opinions from relevant academic experts, and necessary amendments were made based on their feedback. In the subsequent stage, to reduce the number of observed variables and identify latent components, the factor analysis method was applied. This method facilitates the recognition of fundamental structures among the variables.

Findings

The research findings indicate that the phenomenon of *Sanctuary Selection* in public organizations is a multidimensional and deliberate behavior, rooted in four main domains: organizational–managerial, deliberate–instrumental, cultural–social, and psychological–behavioral.

In the organizational–managerial domain, serious deficiencies in the manager appointment system (such as the dominance of personal relationships over merit-based criteria, the influence of political factions, lack of transparency in appointment processes, and absence of effective oversight) create fertile ground for selecting weak managers. These conditions not only hinder the career progression of competent personnel but also entrench a static and inefficient organizational structure by fostering personal power networks and eroding professional culture.

Within the deliberate–instrumental domain, the appointment of low-risk managers functions as a calculated strategy to safeguard one’s position and maintain control over the hierarchy of power. Such appointments reduce the likelihood of managerial challenges and ensure the psychological security and political advantage of senior leaders. Actions including the instrumental use of compliant associates, the prevention of potential rivals

from emerging, sustaining an atmosphere of organizational hopelessness, and steering appointment decisions based on forward-looking calculations collectively reinforce this defensive cycle.

In the cultural–social domain, anti-elite sentiment, a culture of stagnation, nepotism and cronyism, organizational politicization, unsuitable cultural tendencies, and tolerance of inefficiency exacerbate the phenomenon. These factors construct the socio-cultural environment necessary to accept (and even justify) unqualified appointments, while strengthening resistance to innovation through distrust of elites and capable individuals.

The psychological–behavioral domain reflects fears of losing one's position, anxiety and psychological insecurity, aversion to risk and change, conservatism, emotional dependence on subordinates, and the desire to maintain a sense of mental safety. These components show that much of the logic underlying Sanctuary Selection is driven by personal defense mechanisms aimed at reducing perceived threats.

Taken together, these factors across the four domains present a clear picture of the concealed logic behind appointing weak managers: it is a strategic, multi-layered decision designed to consolidate power, limit competition, and preserve the status quo. The consequences include blocking merit-based advancement, weakening human capital, and stalling organizational transformation. Ultimately, these findings indicate that Sanctuary Selection is not an accidental lapse but a systematic outcome of the interplay between a dysfunctional structure, a conservative organizational culture, and the psychological concerns of managers.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that Sanctuary Selection within managerial structures is a defensive and deliberate–instrumental behavior, rooted in a combination of structural, cultural, instrumental, and psychological factors. Senior managers, aiming to preserve their positions, prevent potential threats, and strengthen personal power networks, intentionally appoint individuals who are low-risk, lack competitive capabilities, and are generally weaker to lower levels of the organization. These appointments are deliberately designed so that the subordinate's competencies never pose a threat to the senior manager's authority. The organizational consequences of this phenomenon are profound and enduring. Declining productivity, reduced quality of decision-making, sluggish responses to environmental changes, and the displacement of elite and expert personnel are among its direct outcomes. Under such circumstances, the organizational climate evolves into a conservative, stagnant, and closed environment that resists innovation and healthy competition. Informal power networks become entrenched, fostering mutual dependency between senior managers and weaker appointees—where the preservation of these relationships takes precedence over achieving organizational goals. At the cultural–social level, Sanctuary Selection reinforces anti-elite attitudes, expands nepotism, and legitimizes unqualified appointments. Gradually, this behavior becomes normalized in segments of the managerial environment, rendering resistance increasingly difficult. This culture, by tolerating inefficiency and fostering distrust toward capable individuals, obstructs pathways to structural reform. From a psychological–behavioral standpoint, aversion to risk, anxiety over potential loss of power, and the need for mental security emerge as key drivers of decision-making in this process. These factors compel senior managers to maintain the deliberate (instrumental strategy) even when fully aware of its detrimental consequences. Breaking free from this cycle requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach: overhauling the appointment system with transparent merit-based and expertise-driven criteria; establishing independent committees to evaluate managerial appointments; reducing job insecurity among managers; curbing political-factional interference; and cultivating a culture that values competence and healthy competition. Equipping managers with skills to overcome the fear of competition and adapt to change can diminish the psychological incentives sustaining this behavior.

KEY WORDS

Sanctuary Selection, Incompetence, Based Selection, Management Structure, Governmental Organizations.

