

Principled Organizational Dissent in State Universities and Colleges in Metro Cebu

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ABSTRACT

State Universities and Colleges are offices of public trust. These are institutions in which accountability and transparency are indispensable and thus conscientious and principled dissent is a matter of duty. This study inquired into the instances of Principled Organizational Dissent (POD) in State Universities and Colleges (SUC) in Metro Cebu and the perception of POD among the said SUC employees. As evidenced by the cases and complaints filed before the Office of the Ombudsman Visayas, the Civil Service Commission, Region VII, and respective SUCs, SUC employees do engage in POD. The study revealed that most SUC employees –administrators and non-administrators alike- are willing to engage in POD provided that such should be channeled through the grievance mechanisms of their respective institutions. Optimistically, almost all of the respondents valued the benefits of dissent over and above its putative detriments. Characteristically Filipino, most respondents believed that they have the support of their families, friends, and other people who are important to them whenever they engage in POD. The respondents' positive attitude towards conscientious and principled dissent underscores a deep sense of public service, professionalism, ethical and political maturity, participatory citizenship, and a profound commitment to a just and humane society. Hence, the essence of democracy is vibrant in the higher institutions of learning, particularly in the State Universities and Colleges in Metro Cebu.

Keywords: *Principled Organizational Dissent (POD), Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) Mode of POD, Negative Attitude, Perceived Behavioral Control, Positive Attitude*

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are governed by regulations that ensure orderly and effective operation. Organ (1988) remarked that the capacity of employees to exert efforts that go beyond their formal job requirement significantly contributes to the effective functioning of an organization. These extra role efforts are properly called **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**. OCB refers to positive, individual employee workplace behavior that engenders

effectiveness and efficiency in an organization (Organ, 1988). These are types of behavior that exceed the call of duty and role expectation and are not motivated by formal reward or recognition (Koster & Koster, 2005). Podsakoff et al (2006) quoting Van Dyke, Cummings, and McLean-Parks (1995) considered OCB as **Extra Role Behavior (ERB)** which by nature is beneficial to an organization. Organ listed *altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and civic virtue* as determinants of OCB.

Jill Wescott Graham (1986) identified an aspect of OCB which he called **Principled Organizational Dissent** (POD). POD consists of conscientious actions as a form of objection to perceived violations of ethical, administrative and other legal standards governing an organization. Closely linked with social norms, POD is an attempt to observe and sustain efficiency, legitimacy, fairness, and ethical behavior in the organizational culture (Sims, 1994; Podsakoff et al, 2006; Greenberg & Edwards, 2009).

Graham typified POD into five modes:

Internal-stay: the individual protests a wrongdoing and makes an internal change effort using internal channels; he remains in the organization;

Internal-leave: the individual leaves the organization but explains his reasons for resigning;

External-stay: the individual protests and makes an internal change effort by using external pressure; he stays in the organization;

External-leave: the individual makes a public protest and leaves the organization

Le Pine and Van Dyne (1998) clarified that the exercise of POD is intended to effect desirable and valuable changes in an organization. Dovidio et al (2006) claimed that POD is a prosocial action against illegal, immoral, and unprincipled behavior and tends to promote positive organizational change. POD is desirable when organizations put premium on good ethical climate.

Greenberg and Edwards (2009) noted that the ethical climate prevailing in an organization either encourages or discourages POD. Van Dyne et al (1995) stated that the employees' sense of allegiance to a higher cause or more important values may give rise to POD. Miceli and Near (2005) suggested that if employees feel that they have the power to put an end to a serious organizational violation, they are most likely engage in POD.

However, Thoreau (1993) as quoted by Cameron et al (2003) cautioned that principled actions which are by nature revolutionary could lead to changes in relations, roles, norms, goals, and choice of opportunities in positive or negative ways. Furthermore, courageous principled action may result in difficulties such that the individual may be despised, pressured to leave the organization, or cause ill feelings. Other consequences may be far worse like loss or transfer of job (Bergman et al, 2007).

There is high expectation for the exercise of POD particularly in educational institutions. Since higher educational institutions are bastions of intellectual freedom in which ethical climate is paramount (Reynolds and Weber, 2004), educators are considered not only as intellectual leaders but also as ethical exemplars who must lead by example by upholding high ethical standards and adhering to the core-values of their respective institutions (Gamage, 2006). In the Philippines, employees, - administrators and non-administrators alike- of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) are governed by the Civil Service laws, their respective SUC charters, internal policies, as well as other pertinent laws. Official regulations,

organizational ethical culture, and social norms provide the context in which POD is to occur.

Do SUC employees in Metro Cebu engage in POD? How do they manifest their POD behaviors? How do SUC employees view POD? Is there a difference in the perception of POD between SUC administrators and non-SUC administrators?

Employing anecdotal records and survey using researcher-modified tool, this study inquired into the instances of POD in State Universities and Colleges in Metro Cebu, namely, Cebu Normal University (Osmeña Boulevard, Cebu City), Cebu Technological University (Palma St., Cebu City), University of the Philippines (Lahug, Cebu City), Talisay City College (Talisay City), and Mandaue City College (Mandaue City) and determined the perception of POD of the employees of the same SUCs. Randomly selected administrators and non-administrators from the five SUCs were asked to answer questions concerning their preferred POD mode and their perceptions of the social, behavioral, positive and negative aspects of POD. A narrative description of the complaints and cases involving employees of the five aforementioned SUCs filed before the Office of the Ombudsman Visayas, the Civil Service Commission Region VII, and within the SUCs themselves was also done.

Principled Dissent in SUCs

SUC employees, both administrators and non-administrators, are governed by the Civil Service laws of the Philippines, their respective SUC charters, internal policies, and other pertinent laws. These laws and policies comprise the organizational regulations of each SUC.

When violations of organizational regulations occur, some concerned individuals would react by filing a complaint against perceived perpetrators. These complaints could be filed before the pertinent offices within the SUCs, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the Civil Service Commission.

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) mandates that all SUCs should establish a permanent grievance committee. It was found that not all SUCs have grievance machineries, and if there are, some are not functional. In SUCs where a grievance committee has not been established, or if established, not functional, a committee (usually fact-finding) is formed to deal with individual complaints or cases filed before the office the SUC president or before any of the SUC administrative offices. Moreover, all SUCs are supposed to have a resident ombudsman. As in the case of a grievance committee, some SUCs did not have a resident ombudsman.

Most of the cases filed before the Civil Service Commission (CSC) pertained to administrative matters which are either disciplinary or non-disciplinary cases. The CSC does not act on anonymous complaints. Complaints filed before the Office of the Ombudsman include administrative and criminal cases. The Office of the Ombudsman acts on signed or anonymous complaints and issues. Anonymous complaints would be acted upon if supported by substantial evidence. In many instances, cases that were filed within the SUCs bore the identity of complainants.

In keeping with the ethics of confidentiality, the cases and complaints are described in general terms. The SUCs

as well as the parties involved are not identified. The cases include the following:

- Personal quarrels
- Conflicts in the performance of duties
- Questionable or illegal entries in the Daily Time Record
- Plagiarism (Master’s Thesis and Doctoral Dissertation)
- Use of instructional materials without permission from the author
- Problems in the issuance of pay slip
- Complaints against delay in salary (Part-time instructors)
- Illicit affairs
- Sexual harassment
- Insubordination
- Violations of R.A. 3019 “Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act”
- Violations of R.A. 6713 “Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees”
- Complaints concerning legitimacy of certain SUC policies
- Complaints concerning non-bidding of an SUC student uniform

- Falsification of documents
- Drunkenness
- Smoking within the SUC premises
- Grave and simple misconduct
- Serious dishonesty
- Tardiness and frequent absences
- Incompetence
- Dereliction of duty

Whether or not the respondents had been found guilty, the fact that these cases and complaints were brought to the attention of the above-mentioned government agencies, reveals that SUCs employees do engage in POD. The complaints and cases themselves are a manifestation of POD.

POD Perception in SUCs

One of the aspects of this study pertained to the question on whether SUC employees would protest against any perceived organizational violations, and if they would, what mode of POD they preferred.

Table 1. Mode of POD

MODE OF PRINCIPLED ORGANIZATIONAL DISSENT	NON-ADMINISTRATORS		ADMINISTRATORS	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
1. If I perceived an offense in my institution, I would protest against it.	2.73	Agree	2.8	Agree
2. If I perceived an offense, I would keep quiet about it and remain in the institution.	2.09	Disagree	1.87	Disagree
3. If I perceived an offense, I would keep quiet about it and leave the institution.	2.01	Disagree	1.96	Disagree
4. If I perceived an offense, I would protest against it using internal channels and leave the institution.	2.09	Disagree	1.89	Disagree
5. If I perceived an offense, I would protest against it using internal channels and remain in the institution.	2.60	Agree	2.65	Agree
6. If I perceived an offense, I would protest against it using external channels and remain in the institution.	2.11	Disagree	2.31	Disagree
7. If I perceived an offense, I would protest against it using external channels and leave the institution.	1.94	Disagree	1.87	Disagree
Average Mean	2.22	DISAGREE	2.19	DISAGREE

Legend:

- 3.28 – 4.00 Strongly Agree
- 2.52 - 3.27 Agree
- 1.76 – 2.51 Disagree
- 1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree

The study found that SUC employees –administrators and non-administrators alike- would protest against any violation of organizational regulations rather than keep quiet about it. They also said that they would remain in the institution. To protest against a wrongdoing and at the same time remain in the organization are both reasonable and practical since conscientious dissent is also an expression of one’s loyalty and dedication to the organization.

Moreover, both administrators and non-administrators preferred internal mechanisms or channels of their institution as a medium of protest. The preference can be explained by alluding to the nature of POD itself, that is, conscientious dissent is intended to benefit the organization. Internal mechanisms are purposively mediatory and reconciliatory. This does not only protect the organization from unnecessary exposure but also shields the organization from adverse publicity and ill-repute, considering the Filipino Culture of resiliency, this response is rather anticipated.

There is however an isolated case involving an anonymous complainant who allegedly gathered evidence by taking hidden photos of his colleagues in school not wearing proper attire on a Saturday. The complaint was deemed more of a malicious criticism because it was obviously done to besmirch a colleague out of ill-repute and jealousy, granting that it was done to a fellow department mate. This brings the contention that how most members of an organization would by and large conduct a POD for the betterment of the organization there are/is some/one who abuse/s the reputation of the POD. “How does an organization create a culture that

encourages employees to ask questions early—to point out issues and show courage in confronting unethical or illegal practices? In other words, how does an organization encourage internal whistleblowing? (Ravishankar, 1998) - putting in mind the individual employees’ perceptions towards it. The complaint was done to merely report a transgression in the organization rather than to improve it. This instance will bring us back to the understanding of Principled Organization Dissent among the SUC employees, their individual attributes that enable them to pursue their intentions in engaging it (dissent) and what they expect to happen after they have exposed their issues.

Negative Attitude Factors of POD

POD is a form of OCB, and as such it is generally beneficial to an organization. However, adverse consequences are possible. On the one hand, the ordinary SUC employees admitted that if they engaged in POD, they would suffer reprisals such as antagonism from workmates and superiors, decline or loss of the prospect of promotion, or worse, transfer or loss of job. On the other hand, administrators did not think that anyone who would protest against any wrongdoing would be subjected to retaliatory measures and antagonism. They did agree that decline or loss of the opportunity for promotion and termination from work might be a possible consequence.

Non-administrators showed cognizance of the possible unpleasant consequences in engaging in POD. They were also consistent in their views on the negative aspect of POD. With this notion in mind, non-administrators tend to shy away from dissent especially when it

involves their superiors who expectedly would defend themselves and their positions. Considering the CSCs regard for moral, professional, dignity, and integrity among SUC employees being the models of impeccable value in promoting unquestionable moral fiber among the youth of the country, any dissent towards the SUC administrators will most likely be publicized negatively. In the case of dissent among non-administrators themselves would most likely to prosper, since each member would assess their own traits to be equal in footing among themselves. Such that, they believe that their respective administrators will likewise take action on their dissent since they (administrators) are not directly involved in the issue.

However, the administrators gave inconsistent and even contradictory answers. While they refuted retaliation and antagonism as possible outcomes of protesting any wrongdoing, they contradicted themselves by acceding that those who engaged in POD would be in danger of losing or declining their prospects of promotion or of termination. This inconsistency may be viewed as the administrators' bias against principled dissent from their subordinates. There appear to be apprehensions of dissent

either conscientious or otherwise on the part of the administrators. This is attitude could have been due to the fact that any principled complaint will always involve the management or administration. This will bring us to the notion theorized by Donald Vredenburg & Yael Brender (1998) that there are organizational conditions that allow or encourage the abuse of power and managers' particular sources of power interact with these motives and attributes to define decisions about abusing power. Norms and considerations of risk influence these decisions. Here they noted that disrespect for individual dignity and interference with job performance or deserved rewards, conceptualize the interpersonal abuse of power. Among the dissenters in an organization, there is a concept too that isolate such notion, as in the case of an administrator who chose to not engage in the action because relationships within organization is far more important than correcting its flaws especially when it involves fellow administrators. Taking into consideration the type and the degree of the issue that is about to be raised, some administrators choose to look at the other side to protect their individual relationships within the organization with the belief that this action could also do the same to the entire organization.

Table 2. Negative Attitude Factors as Perceived by SUC Administrators and Non-Administrators

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE FACTORS	NON-ADMINISTRATORS		ADMINISTRATORS	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
1. If I reported the questionable act, I would be retaliated against.	2.35	Agree	2.62	Disagree
2. If I reported the questionable act, my coworkers would make my life difficult.	2.25	Agree	2.58	Disagree
3. If I reported the questionable act, my future prospects (i.e. promotions) with the company would decline.	2.33	Agree	2.36	Agree
4. If I reported the questionable act, I would probably be fired.	2.1	Agree	2.24	Agree
Average Mean	2.26	AGREE	2.45	AGREE

Legend:

- 1.00 – 1.75 *Strongly Agree*
- 1.76 – 2.51 *Agree*
- 2.52 – 3.27 *Disagree*
- 3.28 – 4.00 *Strongly Disagree*

By and large, these perceptions reveal a dichotomy of perspectives. Among ordinary employees, POD could be a potent tool for expressing their grievances against erring colleagues or administrators. For the administrators, POD, especially when engaged against them, could be a challenge and threat to their authority and security of their positions. The dichotomy of perspectives among the administrators does exist since each group has their own perceptions of power among their group members; among their subordinates as in the case of the administrators; and among the administrators themselves who have everything to lose when proven guilty of the dissent issued toward them. Whereas, on the part of the non-

administrators dissent among themselves would most likely to materialize since they perceived each other as equal in footing. And that dissenting among non-administrators themselves is perceived to be promptly acted upon by the administrators because they (administrators) are not directly involved in it.

Positive Attitude Factors of POD

The positive aspects of POD stems from the fact that OCB is in itself a positive and beneficial behavior. In the face of an administrative or criminal offense, which one weighs heavier, the negative or the positive consequences of POD?

Table 3. Positive Attitude Factors as Perceived by SUC Administrators and Non-Administrators

POSITIVE ATTITUDE FACTORS	NON- ADMINISTRATORS		ADMINISTRATORS	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
1.If I did not report the questionable act in this scenario, I would have a guilty conscience.	3.02	Agree	2.87	Agree
2.In order to protect the public, I would need to report the questionable act in this scenario.	2.99	Agree	2.93	Agree
3.If I reported the questionable act in this scenario, I would prevent harm to others (i.e. investors, the public in general, etc.).	3.03	Agree	2.88	Agree
4.If I reported the questionable act in this scenario, the management would correct it.	3.15	Agree	2.93	Agree
5.If I reported the questionable act in this scenario, the ethical climate of the office would improve.	3.12	Agree	3.18	Agree
Average Mean	3.06	AGREE	2.96	AGREE

Legend:

3.28 – 4.00	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
2.52 - 3.27	<i>Agree</i>
1.76 – 2.51	<i>Disagree</i>
1.00 – 1.75	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>

It is interesting to note that both administrators and non-administrators posted a higher average mean in terms of the positive factors of POD than the average mean as regards to the negative factors of POD. From the perspective of both administrators and non-administrators, the moral responsibility to maintain a clean conscience, protect and ensure public welfare, and improve the organizational ethical climate

outweighs the threat of retaliation such as antagonism, loss or decline of the prospects of promotion and termination from work.

Moreover, it is rather intriguing that “trust in the management ranks” as the number one positive factor while the regard for “public welfare” ranks last among non-administrators. It is equally more intriguing to note that

administrators put highest premium on the promotion of improved ethical climate and ranked “trust in the management” second. Nonetheless, the administrators’ and non-administrators’ shared outlook on the positive factors of POD reveals their nationalistic and altruistic orientations.

Behavioral Control of POD

Apart from the negative aspects of POD, there are also behavioral controls which could affect the exercise of POD as well as its putative effects on the dissenters.

Table 4. Perceived Behavioral Control as Perceived by SUC Administrators and Non-Administrators

PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL CONTROL	NON-ADMINISTRATORS		ADMINISTRATORS	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
1. It would not be worth the effort for me to report this questionable act.	2.19	Agree	2.24	Agree
2. There would be too much of a hassle for me to report the questionable act.	2.46	Agree	2.37	Agree
3. It would take too much time and effort for me to report the questionable act.	2.43	Agree	2.43	Agree
4. It would be difficult for me to report the questionable act to the appropriate authority.	2.39	Agree	2.37	Agree
Average Mean	2.37	AGREE	2.35	AGREE

Legend:

- 1.00 – 1.75 *Strongly Agree*
- 1.76 – 2.51 *Agree*
- 2.52 - 3.27 *Disagree*
- 3.28 – 4.00 *Strongly Disagree*

These constraints are rather more technical and personal than social. They are not questions directly pertaining to moral responsibilities toward the self and the public. On the part of the administrators, the cost of time and effort required in POD was the strongest constraint. This was followed by constraints of difficulty and hassle. That POD is not worth one’s effort comes last. From the point of view of the non-administrators, “too much hassle” is the number one constraint. Time and effort comes at second, while difficulty and “not worth the effort” come third and fourth, respectively.

These perceptions could be related to the nature of the position an employee occupies. Administrators might look at complaints are additional burdens to their already demanding positions. Non-administrators might consider POD as “hassle” yet a just and ethical climate is important in the workplace.

Social Factors of POD

The exercise of POD is no trivial matter. It is in fact based on one’s deep-seated convictions and profound moral sense.

Table 5. Social Factors

SOCIAL FACTORS	NON-ADMINISTRATORS		ADMINISTRATORS	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
1. My family would recommend that I report the questionable act.	2.84	Agree	2.66	Agree
2. Most people who are important to me would recommend that I should report the questionable act.	2.89	Agree	2.71	Agree
3. My friends would recommend that I report the questionable act.	2.87	Agree	2.81	Agree
Average Mean	2.87	AGREE	2.73	AGREE
<i>Legend:</i>				
3.28 – 4.00	<i>Strongly Agree</i>			
2.52 - 3.27	<i>Agree</i>			
1.76 – 2.51	<i>Disagree</i>			
1.00 – 1.75	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>			

Administrators and ordinary employees both agreed that one's exercise of POD should have the approval of family, friends, and other significant others. This is because principles and moral sense, no matter how personal these are, find their basis in shared social norms. Moreover, the exercise of POD is a citizenship behavior thus the need for social approval.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Principled dissent in State Universities and Colleges in Metro Cebu does exist as evidenced by the factual existence of cases that were filed before pertinent government agencies. This is supported by the expressed willingness to conscientiously protest any wrongdoing in the work place by a great majority of the respondents. The most preferred mode of protest is "internal channel," which shows the respondents' commitment and identification with their institutions. Optimistically, almost all of the respondents valued the benefits of dissent over and above its putative detriments. Characteristically Filipino, most respondents believed that they have the support of their families, friends, and other people who are important to them whenever they engage in POD.

The SUC employees' readiness to protest any wrongdoing that may occur within their respective institutions along with the common preference for internal mechanisms to address complaints, demonstrates a sense of public accountability, respect and loyalty to the institution, and dedication to maintain a healthy ethical climate in the workplace. The same commitment to engage in POD whenever the situation requires is evidence of a mature understanding of public and participatory citizenship- a trait which is essential to the pursuit of a just and humane society.

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