



Determinants of academics' grievances: Evidence with special reference to University of Ruhuna

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Abstract

Grievances are inherent elements of any working organization and this leads to create more unfavorable consequences for the development of both individual and organization. Thus, today's human resources managers are facing challenge of effectively managing employee's grievances while maintaining tradeoff between individual and organizational goal achievement. This paper aims to investigate the factors leading to grievances among university academics. Further, relationship between demographic variables (gender and marital) and grievances also explored. Data were collected using self reported questionnaire from 86 university academics in the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. Sample of 86 academics was selected from four faculties located at Wellamadama premises: Management and Finance, Science, Fisheries and Marine science and Humanities and social sciences. Survey results revealed that a grievance is a multidimensional construct which can be measured by means of several factors. Further factor analysis concluded that these determinants can be categorized three elements job related, working condition related and human resource policy related grievances. Further, it was found that there is no significant difference between gender and marital of the academics with regard to the determinants of grievances. Since no empirical studies carried out on this issue in Sri Lanka context particularly focusing on this employee group, the findings of the study would be important for university administration and career counselors in making decisions and implementing program for assisting employees to manage the stress pertaining to the grievances.

Keywords: academics, determinants of grievances, gender, grievances, marital

Introduction

Globalization and environmental changes has brought about a radical transformation in what organizations need to do to maintain competitiveness in their competing industries. Agrawala (2008) contends that achieving sustainable competitive advantage in turbulent environment has become a critical challenge and maintaining contented workforce within the organization would become one of paramount strategic alternative in addressing this challenge. Though many organizations pursue variety of strategies to develop and maintain self satisfied workforce, they have not been able to attain expected result of it. Opatha (2009) argues that devising fair and reliable performance evaluation mechanism, maintaining effective wages and salary administration program, providing adequate number of training and development opportunities, guiding for career development, maintain favorable industrial relation would yield the positive outcomes. In addition to attending for the employee grievances, solving them at the right time is also playing key role in maintaining more satisfied and committed employees. Davis (1971) defines the grievance as any real or imagined feeling of personal injustice, which an employee

concerning his employment relationship. Grievances may occur due to many reasons connected with the employer employee relationship. Previous literature proves that many detrimental consequences arise if the management does not effectively manage the employee grievances. Opatha (2009) argues that as a result of the effective grievance system employee morale, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and loyalty would be enhanced while minimizing the employees' work related stress to the expected level. Moreover, Klass and Dénisi (1989) found that when the employees have an opportunity to access to effective, unbiased grievance system it is more likely for them to stay in the organization. Thus, it is essential for any types of organization to design, implement and maintain the effective grievances handling system for achieving both employee and organizational goals and objectives.

As far as the university system in Sri Lanka is concerned, academic staff particularly, has been suffered from the many grievances due to non existence of the effective grievances managing system. Academics are generally treated as the intellectual property of the country and their contribution to the social and economic development is paramount in terms of knowledge creation and dissemination. As the academics' role is comparatively varying from the other employees, they tend to experience a set of specific grievances in their profession. Research on the grievances mainly have focused on exploring factors influencing on employees' grievances and their impact on employees the work related behavior. Despite the importance there is no empirical research carried out focusing academics' grievances. Thus, present study attempts to investigate the factors influencing on university academics with special reference to four faculties of the University of Ruhuna namely, Management and Finance, Science, Fisheries and Marine science and Humanities and social sciences. Further, the study aims at indentifying whether there is an impact of demographic variables (gender and marital) on the level of grievances of the academics. Thus the present study would be of greater importance for the government, education unions or commissions, and the university administration in making policy decisions on developing more satisfied academics and retaining them for a longer period of time with the organization. On the other hand significant contribution can be made by filling the gap in literature as there is no previous study on this phenomenon in Sri Lankan context.

Literature review

A grievance is a multidimensional construct which is depending on number of factors. Davis, (1971) defines grievance as any real or imagined feeling of personal injustice, which an employee has concerning his employment relationship. On the other hand, Yoder and Stautobar (1982) defined the grievances as a written complaint filed by an employee and claiming unfair treatment. Moreover, International labor organization (2009) points out that a grievances is a complaint of one or more workers in respect of wages, allowances, condition of work and interpretation of service stipulations covering such areas as overtime, leave, transfer, promotion, seniority, job assignment and termination of service. Thus this study hypothesizes academics grievance is a multidimensional construct that is determined by many factors.

H1: Grievance is a multidimensional construct that measures on many factors

Grievances perhaps can be clearly seen from the employee behaviors like absenteeism, late to work, slow work, and making conflicts with others. Sometimes it is very easy for administrators to clearly identify that employees are suffering from the grievances. Some employees directly

communicate their grievance to the responsible officers while some do not. However, human resource managers are equally responsible for effectively dealing with both clearly observable and uninformed grievances. Generally grievance can have a two form: Formal or informal. Opatha (2009) pointed out that informal grievances are complaints in verbal while formal grievances are complaints in writing. It is vital to attend to the grievances of the employees as it may create detrimental effects. The issue of identifying formal and informal types of grievances can be managed by the managers in pursuing various strategies. Literature on this aspects suggest that conducting exit interviews, carrying out attitudes surveys, fixing complaint boxes and making observation are the generally applying techniques for understanding of the employee grievances.

Employees are suffering from grievances due to many reasons. Nature of work, technological changes, the type of technology used, decision making centralization, and general work environments are major factors affecting to number of grievances of an organization (Ng and Dastmalchian, 1989). Many studies have been investigated the impact of demographic variables on employee grievance. Priecs *et al.* (1976) found that employees' age, gender and working experience have an impact on increasing or decreasing number of grievances cases filed against the employer. The literature on this aspect suggests that impacts of gender on grievance are generating mix results. Thus in this study researcher would expect that female academics are more subjected to grievances than male.

H2- Female academics experiences more grievances compared to male academics

Concerning union management relationship Gants et al (1981) found that favorable union management relationship lead to lowering the grievances cases. Employees' marital status is also another important variable that was tested in many empirical studies. The findings reveal mix results as with the gender. Thus, in the present study hypothesize that married academics are suffering grievances than unmarried academics.

H3: Married academics experience more grievances compared to unmarried academics

H4: Difference of the grievances among male- female and married –unmarried academic are significant

Opatha (2009) argues that the determinants of grievances can be identified in a many forms such as heavy work load, insufficient training opportunities, strict leave procedure, inflexible working conditions, unfavorable superior subordinate relationship, unfair performance evaluation, insufficient salary and incentives. The several empirical studies have been conducted in Sri Lankan context to find out the most significant determinants of grievances in a specific employee groups. Empirical study based on managers in Banking industry in Sri Lanka, Opatha et al (2004) found that job itself is the critical factor influencing on determining the occurrence of grievances. Further, Kumara (2005) found in his study of apparel industry that job itself, job tools, responsibility/authority, working environment, wages/salary, job advancement are influencing on creating grievances.

Opatha (2009) argues that there would be a detrimental effect on both individual and organizational level performance and success, if the employee grievances are not solved at the

right time. Bluen (1994) contends that grievances may lead to create frustration and perception of unfair treatment which finally tend to strikes. Spector (2000) also argues that feeling of unfair treatment lead to a variety of counterproductive behaviors like work slowdown and sabotage. Ichniowski (1986) found that grievances filing rates are negatively correlated with workplace productivity and product quality. In addition, Brian (1989) contend that dissatisfaction of the employees due to grievances response in different ways such as being absent, disruptive workplace behavior Further Sharma (1984) argues that it is essential for maintaining effective grievances handling system in an organization an if not, it tends to increase the level of employee unrest.

Materials and Methods

The present study investigates the impact of demographic variables on university academics' grievances. In order to check whether the questionnaire was understandable, initially, a pilot study was carried out. For this purpose six academics in the faculty of management and finance, university of Ruhuna were interviewed. A Semi structured interview was conducted to gather exploratory data on the study variables. This usually began as an un-structured style of interview, which later turns to semi structured. The interviews were conducted at the respective academic members' office and interviews lasted half an hour. During the interview, the interviewer writes down information and if needed, the respondents were contacted via telephone for further information. Based on the interview results survey questionnaire was amended to certain point. The survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire by means of self administered sample of 86 university academic from the four faculties of the university of Ruhuna. The questionnaire consists of two parts. Part one was focused on determinants of grievances while part two was covered demographic variables of the respondents. Demographic variables considered in the present study was that age, gender, marital, education, current position and faculty. Hundred questionnaires were delivered to the respondents using E-mail and walking to relevant academics' offices. A total of 86 respondents returned the questionnaire and all were suitable for further analysis. Sample consists of 59% males and 41% females. The analysis was performed using SPSS 13.0. Factor analysis, independent sample t test and ANOVA test have been used to test the hypothesis.

Results and discussion

Determinants of grievances

The 17 items causing to grievances were first subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS. Prior to performing PCA the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed that the presence of many coefficients of 0.3 and above. The KMO value was 0.642, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance ($P = 0.00$), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. Factor analysis using principal components procedure with Varimax rotation produced three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 accounting 49 percent (Table 1) of the common variance. The interpretation of the three components was consistent with the literature and extracted components are illustrated in Table 1. Factors are classified into three categories namely job related, working condition related and human resource policy related grievances. Thus hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Reliability of the variables was also examined using Cronbach's Alpha and Table 1 shows the results confirming that all values exceeding the threshold values of 0.60 (Walsh, 1995).

Table 01: Factor analysis results

Factors	Alpha		
	1	2	3
Job related factors	0.75		
Do not have capabilities to perform duties	0.577		
Entrusted to perform duties that is not in my list	0.440		
I am placed on a job that does not match with my knowledge and skills	0.786		
The training given to perform the job is not adequate and relevant	0.425		
There are many work hazards and unpleasant condition in my job that threatening my health and safety	0.576		
I have poor relationship with my head and other superiors	0.581		
My heads and other superiors follows an authoritative and inflexible leadership style	0.766		
Total variance explained	18.3		
Working condition related factors	0.61		
I have been assigned too many duties that could not be handled			0.755
I have to work with the ever changing work schedule			0.620
Required teaching equipments and other facilities are not often available to perform the job successfully			0.577
Total variance explained	13.4		
Human Resources policies related factors	0.64		
I am satisfied with salary and other benefits of my job		0.493	
Leave policy of university system (Study leave, Maternity leave etc..) is flexible		0.574	
University provides me with adequate training and development opportunities		0.690	
performance is evaluated on regular basis using relevant performance criteria		0.703	
Performance evaluation procedure is easy to understand		0.621	
Current promotion scheme is strict		0.307	
There is opportunity to get transfers, When I need		0.544	
Total variance explained	17.4		

Analysis of impact of demographic variables

Determinants of grievances were categorized into three main variables based on the factor analysis results. Mean comparison was carried out for the male and female academics with respect to job related variable (JR) which was measured through 07 items and results are shown in table 2, 3 and 4. Across all indicators except JR6 recorded higher scores for job related variable for the female academics. This gives insight that female academics are suffering from job related grievance than the male. Working condition related variable (WC) was measured using 03 items. As in the Table 03, female academic reported higher mean score than males. Finally human resource policy related variables (HRP) were analyzed using 7 indicators. Results indicate that except HRP1, HRP2, and HRP5 all the other variables recorded higher mean score for female academics (Table 04). Finally when it comes to overall grievance, the present study found that female academics (M= 4.03 SD=0.76) are more subjected to grievances than male (M=3.76, SD=0.76) (Table 05). Thus the hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Table 02: Mean comparison for job related variables

<i>Gender</i>		<i>JR1</i>	<i>JR2</i>	<i>JR3</i>	<i>JR4</i>	<i>JR5</i>	<i>JR6</i>	<i>JR7</i>
Male (N=51)	Mean	1.67	3.35	1.84	3.33	3.22	2.92	3.27
	SD	1.01	1.65	1.28	1.69	1.90	2.01	2.01
Female (N=35)	Mean	2.03	4.43	2.29	3.91	3.31	2.60	3.34
	SD	1.52	1.83	1.61	1.73	1.71	1.83	2.05
Total (N=86)	Mean	1.81	3.79	2.02	3.57	3.26	2.79	3.30
	SD	1.25	1.80	1.43	1.72	1.81	1.91	2.01

Table 03: Mean comparison for working condition related variables

<i>Gender</i>		<i>WC1</i>	<i>WC2</i>	<i>WC3</i>
Male (N=51)	Mean	3.14	3.47	4.21
	SD	1.68	2.02	1.98
Female (N=35)	Mean	4.31	4.14	4.61
	SD	1.43	1.95	1.75
Total (N=86)	Mean	3.62	3.74	4.53
	SD	1.68	2.01	1.91

Table 04: Mean comparison for human resource policy related variables

<i>Gender</i>		<i>HRP1</i>	<i>HRP2</i>	<i>HRP3</i>	<i>HRP4</i>	<i>HRP5</i>	<i>HRP6</i>	<i>HRP7</i>
Male (N=51)	Mean	5.47	4.45	4.69	4.71	4.18	4.67	5.04
	SD	1.70	1.94	1.66	1.65	1.50	1.86	1.87
Female (N=35)	Mean	5.06	4.31	4.80	4.91	3.91	4.94	5.77
	SD	1.89	1.67	1.71	1.46	1.50	1.69	1.53
Total (N=86)	Mean	5.30	4.40	4.73	4.79	4.07	4.78	5.34
	SD	1.78	1.83	1.67	1.57	1.50	1.79	1.77

Table 05: Gender wise mean comparison of grievances

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Job Related</i>	<i>Working condition</i>	<i>HR policies</i>	<i>Total Grievances</i>
Male(N=51)	Mean	2.80	3.73	4.74	3.76
	SD	1.00	1.40	.94	0.76
Female (N=35)	Mean	3.13	4.29	4.81	4.03
	SD	1.21	1.23	0.90	0.76
Total(N=86)	Mean	2.93	3.96	4.77	3.87
	SD	1.09	1.36	0.92	0.77

Second demographic variable considered in the present study was the marital status of the respondents. As in the Table 06, it was noted that unmarried academics recorded higher mean score with respect to the job related (M=2.95) and working condition related grievance (M=4.22). Married academics however, reported higher mean score for the human resource policy related grievances (M=4.89). As far as the overall grievance is concerned married academics accounted higher mean score (Married: M=3.89, Unmarried: M=3.82). Thus researcher would accept the hypothesis 3 which stated that married academics are more subjective to grievances than unmarried academics.

Table 06: Marital status wise mean comparison of grievances

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Job Related</i>	<i>Working condition</i>	<i>HR policies</i>	<i>Total Grievances</i>
Married (N=57)	Mean	2.92	3.83	4.89	3.89
	SD	1.07	1.38	0.87	0.77
Unmarried (N=29)	Mean	2.95	4.22	4.52	3.82
	SD	1.15	1.31	0.98	0.78
Total(N=86)	Mean	2.93	3.96	4.77	3.87

In order to assess whether there is a significant difference between gender and determinants of grievances ANOVA test was performed and results are shown in the Table 07. ANOVA test suggest that there is no significant differences of the grievances among the male and female academics. As in the table 08, it could be suggested that there is no significant differences among married and unmarried academics when it comes to total grievances. Thus the hypothesis 04 which state that there is a significant difference of the grievances among married –unmarried academic would be rejected.

Table 07: ANOVA results: Gender wise analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Sum of Square</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Job Related	2.253	2.253	1.892	0.173
Working condition	6.432	6.432	3.564	0.062
HR policies	0.114	0.114	0.132	0.176
Total Grievances	1.451	1.451	2.485	0.119

Table 08: ANOVA results: Marital wise analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Sum of Square</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Job Related	0.011	0.011	0.009	0.026
Working condition	3.067	3.067	1.663	0.101
HR policies	2.633	2.633	3.172	0.079
Total Grievances	0.100	0.100	0.167	0.284

Conclusion

The paper attempted to investigate the factors influencing on grievances among the university academics. The study concluded that grievances are a multidimensional construct and factor analysis revealed that academics grievances would be categorized into three major pillars namely job related, working condition related and human resource policy related grievances. Present studies also examined the impact of demographic variables on grievances. The study found that female academics are more subjected to grievances than male. Further, study found that married academics are more subjected to grievances than unmarried academics. Finally study concluded that there are no significant differences of the grievances among male- female and married – unmarried academics. The present study is limited in scope of the sample. The study select academics only attached to four faculties in the University of Ruhuna located in southern province Sri Lanka. Since there is a slight difference in cultural elements of the geographic region, these results may not be able to generalize entirely to the other universities located in other parts of the Sri Lanka.

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