

JOB DISPLACEMENT DUE TO FAVORITISM: AN ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES FOR THE EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract. This article delves into the growing phenomenon of job displacement stemming from favoritism (nepotism, bias). While favoritism has traditionally distorted employment by benefiting certain individuals at the expense of more qualified candidates, its impact on workforce stability and motivation is profound. The study examines the mechanisms by which favoritism undermines meritocracy, resulting in personnel selection based on personal connections rather than competencies. Based on a survey conducted in Bulgaria, the findings confirm that favoritism, particularly nepotism, is a widespread practice. This leads to significantly low motivation, a negative team environment, and an increased willingness among employees to quit their jobs. The article also proposes a framework for analyzing the risk of job displacement, considering both individual (skills, experience) and institutional factors (company policies, regulations). In conclusion, potential strategies and policies for mitigating the negative effects of favoritism are discussed, including promoting transparency in selection processes and investing in fair and equitable workplace cultures.

Keywords: favoritism; nepotism; motivation

1. Introduction

The study examines the mechanisms by which favoritism undermines meritocracy and results in personnel selection based on personal connections rather than competencies. This, leading to low motivation and increased willingness to quit job measured by questionnaire. The socio-economic implications of these processes are discussed, including rising inequality, the necessity for reskilling, and a rethinking of the human role in the future labor market, which is also included in the questionnaire.

The main goal of this research is to empirically investigate the prevalence and perceived impact of favoritism in the Bulgarian workplace.

To achieve this, the study undertakes several key tasks: first, to review the theoretical concepts of favoritism and nepotism; second, to design and conduct a survey to assess employees' experiences; third, to analyze the data to identify the most common forms of favoritism and their perceived effects on motivation, workload, and team dynamics; and finally, to evaluate the potential outcomes of removing favoritism from the workplace.

2. Theoretical Overview of Favoritism in the Workplace

Favoritism in the workplace refers to the preferential treatment given to certain employees based on personal relationships, biases, or non-performance-related factors rather than merit [1] (Huseman et al., 2020). In a survey study with 303 U.S. executives, found that more than half (56 percent) of executives admitted to having a favorite candidate when making internal promotion decisions, and 96 percent of them will promote their favorites rather than considering the candidates' communication abilities, which is crucial for the position examined in the study [2]. This phenomenon can undermine organizational fairness, reduce employee morale, and negatively affect productivity. Some indicators for favoritism are [3]:

- Give certain employees better treatment within the workplace;
- Socialize with some employees more;
- Provide more development opportunities;
- Give more frequent and timely feedback;
- Let certain employees get away with actions that other would face punishment or sanctions;
- Consider suggestions only from someone;
- Praise certain employee more;
- Give important work-related information;
- Excuse certain employees for unproductive behaviors.

Consequences of Favoritism:

- Decreased morale and motivation [1];
- Increased turnover intentions;
- Reduced trust in leadership [4];
- Lower organizational commitment [5];
- a sense of lack of belongingness or identification with the organization [6];
- fosters knowledge-hiding behaviors and hampers employees' psychological capital – In other words, when employees have the perception that decision-making in the organization is distorted by dysfunctional political games, fostering favoritism over merit, it undermines their work motivations and by extension their hope, resilience, and more importantly, their well-being [6].

The other well-known form is nepotism – when the manager favorites his/her relatives who work in the organization. Some researchers claim it is: 'Favouring

relatives on the basis of family ties, which more precisely means nepotism, in one way or another in most cases allows the hiring of relatives without merit and adequate qualification, with the later consequences for the institution and the society itself'. Nepotism also arises when family members who are working get preferential treatment or get off with little to no consequences in comparison to other workers [7, 8]. Nepotism can be segregated into the following types [8]:

- Reciprocal Nepotism – Reciprocal nepotism occurs when a person in a position of power hires a family member or acquaintance, and the person accepts the job based on several criteria, including reliance (usually financial dependency), the scope of the exchange, and cultural norms.

- Entitlement Nepotism – It is a distinct kind of nepotism than reciprocal nepotism. In entitlement nepotism, a hired relative or friend feels entitled to a job because of their relationship with the boss or higher authority.

- Cronyism – Nepotism and cronyism have different meanings, but they're frequently used interchangeably. Cronyism is similar, but it occurs when you hire friends or promote close friends above family members. Politicians frequently engage in cronyism.

On the one hand, favoritism is a detrimental workplace behavior that disrupts fairness and employee well-being. Addressing favoritism requires structural and cultural interventions to promote equity and trust.

3. Research methodology and analysis

A survey questionnaire has been designed in two parts. The first one is correlated with the favoritism experience the respondents have; the type of favoritism including nepotism (relatives, family members), personal relationship, good performance and so on; the proposed effect of favoritism on personal motivation, job attitude and willingness to quit job as well as perceived perspective of the same aspects of workplace on other workers. The second part consists questions about age, gender, and field of work.

According to the field of work, a large number of respondents are related to services, education and IT. There is almost equal diversion between male and female respondents and more than 70% are between 31 and 50 years old.

However, on the question about how often is favoritism as a business practice in Bulgaria the respondents indicate it is a often or very often practice (see fig. 1).

On the the figure above there is a Likert scale on which with 1 is marked 'very rare' and with 7 is 'very often'. So according to the responses the highest amount is with 6 corresponding to 'often' (25%) and 17% have marked very often. This is alarming because many of the respondents are experiencing favoritism as part of their employment and may be they don't fear losing their positions but they most certainly have been under the negative effect of it, which would be discussed later on.

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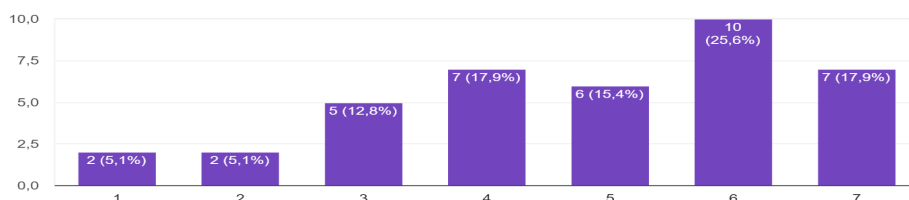


Figure 1. How often as a business practice is favoritism in workplace

On the types of favoritism the respondents had a multiple choice therefore the total amount adds to more than a 100% (see table 1).

Table 1. Types of favoritism

Types of favoritism	Share of responses (%)
Family relation	75
Personal relation (love)	47.5
Good work results	20
Religion	5
Ethnics	15
Other	17

The most common purpose for favoritism is family relation (70%) or personal relationship 47.5%. All other relationships are secondar for the respondents. Religion, ethical or friendship are not a ground for favoritisation on the work place. Apparently, the nepotism is the main form of favoritism in Bulgarian business practice. Surprisingly, some respondents have noted good working results which is a normal way to achieve something in a workplace. Other worth mentioning form is ethnical (15%) or religious which a correlated with supporting local community and longtime government politics of promoting certain ethnics and their political parties.

Table 2. Presumed results of favoritism towards another person

Evaluation (%) >	Undetermined	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree
Indicators v					
Have to look for another job as a result of favoritism towards another person	27.9	20.9	18.6	27.9	4.7
Would have to fulfill other person's work tasks	14	11.6	18.6	37.2	18.6
Your colleague would have to fulfill other person's work task	20.9	6.9	6.9	34.9	27.9
You would have to learn new skills to stay in the current position	11.6	16.3	6.9	30.2	32.6

The responses are quite divided for this indicator. While a substantial portion around 32.6% would have to find another job due to favoritism, a nearly equal portion 39.5% think they would keep the current work position and are not threatened by favorites. The “Undetermined” group is also significant. This suggests that the impact of favoritism on job keeping varies considerably among individuals.

A majority of respondents (55.8%) agree or totally agree that they would have to take on extra work due to another person's favoritism. This indicates a strong perception that favoritism leads to an unequal distribution of workload, burdening those not favored. Even higher amount of respondents consider that others would have to fulfill additional tasks due to favoritism – 62.8%. This suggests a widespread understanding that favoritism can lead to the unfair burdening of other team members, not just oneself. The very low “Disagree” and “Totally Disagree” percentages (6.9% each) reinforce this.

A very strong majority (62.8%) agree or totally agree that they would need to learn new skills to stay in their current position, implying a perceived need for continuous adaptation and improvement to maintain relevance. This could be due to general workplace demands or the competitive environment possibly intensified by favoritism. The low “Disagree” percentages further highlight the acceptance of this necessity.

There's a clear indication that favoritism is perceived to lead to an unfair distribution of workload, with a significant majority agreeing that both they and their

colleagues would have to fulfill others' tasks. The impact of favoritism on job seeking is more nuanced, with a significant portion agreeing to look for another job, but also a considerable portion disagreeing. There's a strong consensus on the necessity of continuous skill development to maintain one's position, regardless of favoritism, though it might be exacerbated by it. Comparing the "Would have to fulfill other person's work tasks" and "Your colleague would have to fulfill other person's work task" questions, it appears respondents are slightly more likely to believe a colleague would take on the burden rather than themselves, though both are high.

Table 3. Presumed effect of favoritism towards another person

Evaluation (%) >	Undetermined	Very negative	Negative	Positive	Very positive
Effect v					
on personal motivation	11.6	32.6	41.9	9.3	2.3
on other work team members	7	37.2	39.5	9.3	4.7
on working environment	9.3	37.2	41.9	9.3	2.3
on desire to quit current position	11.6	18.6	16.3	34.9	7

A vast majority of respondents ($32.6\% + 41.9\% = 74.5\%$) perceive the effect of favoritism towards another person on personal motivation as negative or very negative. Only a small fraction ($9.3\% + 2.3\% = 11.6\%$) see it as positive. This strongly suggests that favoritism has a detrimental impact on individual motivation. Similar to personal motivation, a significant majority ($37.2\% + 39.5\% = 76.7\%$) believe the effect of favoritism towards another person on other work team members is negative or very negative. This indicates a strong perception that the factor negatively impacts the morale and functioning of the wider team.

Again, a dominant majority ($37.2\% + 41.9\% = 79.1\%$) view the effect of favoritism towards another person on the working environment as negative or very negative. This is the highest combined negative percentage among all indicators, highlighting that favoritism is seen as highly detrimental to the overall atmosphere and culture of the workplace.

Given the context of previous analyses (favoritism), a "positive" effect on the "desire to quit" means that the favoritism increases the likelihood of someone wanting to leave their job. Therefore, a higher percentage in the "Positive" and "Very positive" columns for this specific indicator actually signifies a negative impact on employee retention. A substantial portion of respondents (41.9%) are more inclined to leave their jobs because of this factor.

The data strongly suggests that favoritism towards another person has a overwhelmingly negative impact on:

- Personal motivation (74.5% negative/very negative);

- Other work team members (76.7% negative/very negative);
- The overall working environment (79.1% negative/very negative).

Furthermore, this factor significantly increases the desire of individuals to quit their current position (41.9% positive/very positive effect on desire to quit, meaning more desire to quit).

This analysis paints a clear picture of a workplace issue that is perceived as highly detrimental to individual well-being, team cohesion, work atmosphere, and employee retention.

Table 4. Removing favoritism from your workplace would lead

Indicators	Responses (%)
Increased personal motivation	62.8
Decreased of personal motivation	9.3
Increased team motivation	62.8
Decreased team motivation	7
Increased work results	58.1
Increased desire to keep the work position	41.9
Decreased team results	9.3

The overwhelming sentiment among the respondents (43 in total) is that removing favoritism in the workplace would lead to positive outcomes, primarily:

- Increased personal motivation/morale (62.8%);
- Increased general motivation (62.8%);
- Increased work results/performance (58.1%);
- Increased desire to work/contribute (41.9%).

A small minority believes it would lead to negative outcomes such as decreased motivation or results (ranging from 7% to 9.3%). The negative response for the last option is an anomaly and should likely be disregarded or investigated for data integrity.

In conclusion, the survey strongly suggests that employees perceive the removal of favoritism as a significant factor in boosting morale, motivation, and overall productivity in the workplace.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that favoritism is perceived as a pervasive and damaging practice within the Bulgarian business landscape. The data clearly indicates that a significant majority of employees view it not as a rare occurrence, but as a frequent, and even standard, operational behavior. The most prominent form of this practice is nepotism, where family ties dictate professional opportunities over merit and qualification.

The consequences of such an environment are severe and tangible. The analysis demonstrates a strong correlation between the presence of favoritism and a decline in employee well-being. It is a powerful demotivator, eroding personal drive and fostering a sense of injustice. This negativity extends beyond the individual, poisoning the overall team atmosphere and leading to a widespread belief that workloads are distributed unfairly. Crucially, favoritism acts as a significant catalyst for employee turnover, with a substantial portion of the workforce expressing an increased desire to seek employment elsewhere. The motivation of the work force decrease very rapidly because cases of favoritism.

Conversely, the research overwhelmingly suggests that eliminating favoritism would unlock significant organizational benefits. Respondents strongly believe that a merit-based environment would lead to increased personal and team motivation, and ultimately, to improved work results and a greater desire to remain with the company. Therefore, tackling favoritism is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic necessity for any organization aiming to foster a productive, stable, and committed workforce. The implementation of transparent hiring and promotion policies, coupled with clear ethical guidelines and robust accountability mechanisms, is essential to mitigate the destructive impact of favoritism and build a foundation of trust and fairness.

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