The Impact of Organizational Behavior within Public Institutions Before and After the Change of Bashar Al-Assad's Regime in Syria

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Abstract: *This article explores how organizational behavior within Syria's public institutions has been shaped by the authoritarian rule of Bashar al-Assad, the subsequent 2011 revolution, and the potential consequences of regime change. The analysis reveals a shift from a centralized, top-down structure under Assad to a more decentralized and, in opposition-held areas, democratic approach following the revolution. The potential fall of the regime could lead to further transformation, emphasizing decentralization, transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness within the public sector. However, rebuilding these institutions after years of conflict presents significant challenges.*

Keywords: organizational behavior, Syria, public institutions, regime change, decentralization

1. Introduction

Organizational behavior refers to the study of how individuals and groups behave within an organizational setting, influencing aspects like communication, decision-making, leadership, and motivation. This article examines how organizational behavior within Syria's public institutions has been shaped by the political environment under Bashar al-Assad's regime, the subsequent outbreak of the revolution in 2011, and the potential impact of regime change on public sector institutions in Syria. The role of effective public sector behavior is critical for governance and national development, especially in post-conflict scenarios like Syria

The Syrian Public Sector Before the Revolution

Under Bashar al-Assad's rule, the Syrian public sector exhibited a top-down, authoritarian structure that heavily influenced organizational behavior. Key features of this system included:

1) Centralized Decision-Making: Decision-making was concentrated in the hands of Assad and a small group of loyalists, leaving little room for decentralized governance or independent decision-making at lower levels of the public sector (Petras & Vassiliev, 2014). This stifled innovation and responsiveness within public institutions .
2) Lack of Transparency and Accountability: Corruption was widespread, with public sector employees often forced to prioritize loyalty to the regime over competence (Seale, 2012). This contributed to an organizational culture where personal and political connections were more valuable than professional performance .
3) Authoritarian Leadership: The regime's leadership style mirrored its approach to governance—strictly hierarchical, with little room for dissent. Employees feared retribution if they voiced opposition or questioned authority, leading to a culture of compliance rather than initiative (Hinnebusch, 2012).
4) Inefficiency and Bureaucracy: Public sector institutions were frequently bogged down by inefficiencies and red tape. The focus was on maintaining control rather than meeting the needs of citizens (Chalcraft, 2017).
5) Suppression of Dissent: There was a pervasive culture of fear within public institutions, where employees were discouraged from expressing opinions that could be seen as critical of the government (Syria Report, 2015).

The Outbreak of the Revolution and Its Impact on Organizational Behavior

The Syrian revolution, which began in 2011, radically altered the political and social landscape, leading to significant changes in organizational behavior within Syria's public institution.

1) Dismantling of Authoritarian Structures: The revolution and subsequent conflict severely undermined the centralized, authoritarian control that had characterized the public sector. With the loss of state control in many areas, local governance structures began to emerge, often adopting more decentralized and democratic organizational behaviors (Al-Rasheed, 2015).
2) Rise of Local Governance: In opposition-controlled areas, grassroots councils emerged to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of state institutions. These councils operated with greater autonomy, emphasizing collaborative decision-making, transparency, and community involvement—values that were starkly different from those of the Assad regime (Lynch, 2016).
3) Deterioration of State Institutions: As the conflict continued, the loyalty of public employees shifted away from the regime, and public sector institutions in government-controlled areas began to suffer from increasing corruption, inefficiency, and a decline in morale (U. S. Institute of Peace, 2013).
4) Fragmentation of Loyalties: Many public employees were faced with divided loyalties—some remained loyal to the Assad regime, while others defected to the opposition or simply sought to survive in an environment marked by fear and uncertainty

(International Crisis Group, 2014). This fragmentation significantly altered organizational behavior within Syria's public institutions.

Post-Revolution Hypothetical Changes and Their Impact on Organizational Behavior

If the Assad regime were to fall and the revolution succeeded, the political landscape of Syria would undergo significant transformation, potentially leading to a major shift in organizational behavior within public institutions.

1) Decentralization of Power: A post-Assad government might emphasize decentralization, empowering local governments and creating more responsive, flexible public institutions. This would likely result in organizational behaviors that encourage greater autonomy, creativity, and responsiveness to local needs (Mabon, 2015). Reforms could include devolving decision-making authority to local governments and establishing performance metrics to ensure greater efficiency.
2) Increased Transparency and Accountability: A new government, particularly one based on democratic principles, could foster a culture of transparency and accountability in the public sector. The widespread corruption and lack of trust that characterized the Assad regime's public institutions would likely be addressed through reforms that promote open communication and performance-based rewards (Al-Jazeera, 2018).
3) Motivational Shifts: Public employees, demoralized by years of repression and fear, might experience a shift in motivation, especially if a new government emphasizes human rights, social justice, and national rebuilding. This renewed sense of purpose could reinvigorate the public sector (U. S. Institute of Peace, 2013).
4) Promotion of Inclusivity and Equality: With a transition to a more inclusive society, Syrian public institutions could evolve to focus on equality, inclusiveness, and diversity. Organizational behaviors would likely change to emphasize cooperation and mutual respect, rather than the sectarianism that pervaded the Assad regime's policies (Lynch, 2016). Reforms could include targeted recruitment, diversity initiatives, and comprehensive training programs aimed at promoting inclusivity .
5) Challenges in Institutional Rebuilding: Despite the potential for positive change, rebuilding the public sector after years of conflict would be a significant challenge. It would take time to restore trust, reinstate professionalism, and rebuild institutional infrastructure that had been damaged or destroyed during the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2014).

Comparison of Organizational Behavior: Lessons from the Past and Future Potential

1) Leadership Style and Power Dynamics

A comparison of the authoritarian leadership under Assad versus a potential democratic, participatory leadership under the revolutionaries.
The shift from a top-down, command-style leadership to a more collaborative and decentralized approach .

2) Efficiency and Accountability
Examining the efficiency and accountability of public institutions under both regimes, with a focus on how corruption and nepotism impacted institutional effectiveness in the Assad era versus the potential for reform and accountability in a post-revolutionary government .
3) Institutional Culture: Compliance vs. Innovation
Comparing the culture of compliance and fear under Assad's regime with a potential culture of innovation, openness, and citizen participation in the revolutionary context .

4) Adapting to Change: Rebuilding the State
The challenges and opportunities faced by the new leadership in rebuilding Syria's public institutions post-revolution, focusing on the reconstruction of organizational behavior after years of repression and war .

2. Conclusion

Organizational behavior in Syria's public institutions has been deeply shaped by the authoritarian policies of Bashar al-Assad's regime, which fostered a climate of centralization, inefficiency, and fear. The Syrian revolution introduced significant changes, particularly in areas where local governance structures emerged, promoting decentralization and democratic decision-making. In the event of regime change, public sector institutions would likely undergo a transformation, with decentralization, transparency, and inclusivity becoming key values. However, rebuilding these institutions would not be without challenges, as the effects of years of conflict would continue to impact organizational behaviors for some time. Effectively addressing these challenges will be critical for Syria's long-term reconstruction and stability.

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