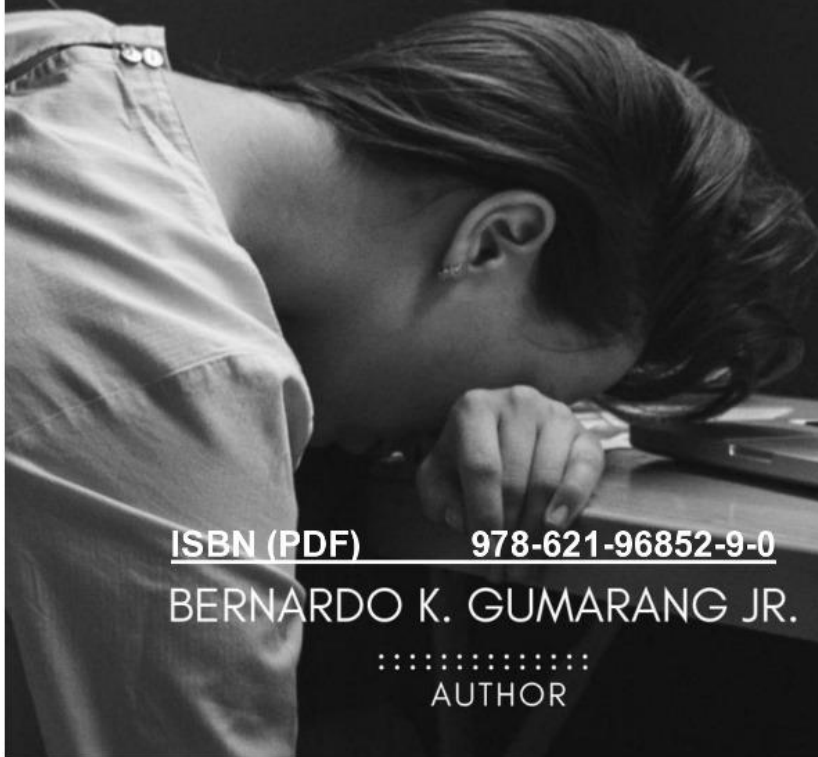




FSH-PH Publication

BEHIND THE LECTURE HALL OF THE ACADEME



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AUTHOR

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Preface

This book deals with the unspoken realities that confront not only the educators and students but the administration as well. Based on my sights and experiences, as well as issues presented by different parties, this book tackles the detrimental and oppressive bureaucracy that curtails the freedom in teaching and learning, the rat race for quick publications, and the high job-induced tension prevalent among most educators.

The book also addresses toxic professional environments found in institutions of higher education such as toxic behavior, a culture of perfectionism and related psychological problems. Each chapter addresses a distinct issue, examining both the nature of the problem and the extent to which it has developed within the academic context.

But it is not the only issues that will be lighted in this book—rather, it is a call to action. I encourage the readers to be more aware of these discrepancies and to help rectify the situation in the field of education. By talking about the different problems and personal experiences of people within a specific community, the book hopes to create awareness about the issue that needs addressing. These are problems that need to be faced and resolved collectively if we are to build an environment within the academic sphere that is more just and equitable.

Do you know what lies behind the lecture wall of the academe? Fasten your seat belt and read on.

The Author

Acknowledgement

To begin with, I would like to give special Thanks to my Family. Your understanding, patience, and unwavering trust have been instrumental in helping me publish this book, and I am deeply grateful for that.

As for everybody else, I would want to take this chance to appreciate those people who, without knowing it, helped me to complete this book with their deeds. There were those who doubted me, sabotaged my efforts, and even threw me under the bus. You guys served as clear examples of what is the importance of resilience and why one has to be persevering. Your actions, which at some point were very painful, motivated me to show that there is more to reaching for the sky and soaring above failure. For that, I have you to thank for giving me the willpower to carry on and accomplish the task that had been started.

I owe the writing of this book to both love and hardship. It speaks of the inner power I acquired from people who loved and supported me, also the people who tried to inhibit me and some of the things I learned from them. Thank you everyone for being a part of it.

Special thanks to my younger sister, Brigitte K. Gumarang, an educator as well. I thank her for her efforts in designing my book cover. Your efforts are highly appreciated.

Above all, I thank God for His grace throughout the writing of this book.

The Author

Dedication

I dedicate this book to all teachers who have endured pain, inequality, and discrimination and even oppression in their profession, yet chose to continue teaching despite the challenges. Their resilience and unwavering commitment to shaping the future, despite the hardships they face, inspire us all to value the true essence of education and the sacrifices they make every day.

The Author

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Chapter 1

The Pressure on Teachers to Publish

Have you ever wondered why you have to dedicate so much time to writing for publication? This is a heartbreaking issue in academia, as it places immense pressure on teachers, in addition to the demands of teaching itself. Teaching in the morning and writing at night—have you ever stopped to think about what you might be losing because of the pressure to publish? Let me enlighten you. If you are experiencing the following negative impacts of this pressure, take a break and read on. See what you might have lost.

The recent times and the continuous quest for publication in academia have thrown me off balance. It is really sad because I used to genuinely enjoy teaching and sharing information, rather than being obsessed with maintaining a constant influx of publications of research and articles in order to fit in the competitive academia. Even while I am writing this book, I have the pressure to finish and publish it as it is required for promotion aside from teaching effectiveness and other requirements. That is not the worst part; working for excellence is no longer the aim. It is even worse; it is not possible to produce excellent work without having the right quantity and impact factor. Quality and relevance do not seem to have any value at all in our age. If it is not published in a high-impact journal, it does not weigh any significance. I

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have seen many of my colleagues, who are talented teachers and researchers, facing issues with their mental well-being because they are being squeezed dry by the very stringent limits on the number of publications. The strain is consistent, making sure that there is no scope for personal development, meditation, or simply for taking a break. Rather than appreciating the efforts we make in the classroom, we are always reminded that if we do not publish, it is too hard to be promoted.

To worsen the situation, this pressure has an impact on how we see ourselves as educators. Rather than establishing bonds with students and nurturing curiosity, we are all trapped in this publishing or perishing rat race. It is draining, and it gives the impression that whatever effort you put in, it is never sufficient. I have mentioned watching people sacrifice themselves, including family time, and giving up the joy of teaching simply so as to meet the publication requirements. It is as if the original vision in the profession is increasingly fading away. And the most annoying thing is that when you manage to publish something, it is not so much a victory because you already turn your gaze to the next paper and the next deadline. It is a rat race; only you are forced to run in order to remain in the same position. The compulsion to generate written work for consideration in one's profession is not only an annoyance; it is truly heartbreaking in that it affects what ought to be an exciting profession and turns it into a tiresome,

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unyielding endeavor, which makes it difficult to cling to that which is most important.

Let me discuss the topic in detail.

In certain academic circles, there is a notion that professional success, tenure, and career advancement can be easily achieved by the favorable "hypothetical expectancy of publication." This phenomenon is common at all levels of graduate education and the ranks of academia, with junior and postgraduates being the most visible. However, more often than not, the problems it brings are left unattended by older, and especially more senior, faculty members, lecturers, professors, and so on. Apart from negatively affecting the quality of research and teaching, the excessive desire to publish brings burnout, health challenges, and erosion of the academic social fabric.

1. The Heartbreaking Cost of the Publish or Perish Culture: Sacrificing Family and Forgetting the True Role of a Teacher

I do not know what specific rank you hold in the academy, but for sure, you are experiencing the same challenges. Professors often find themselves under one-dimensional pressure to focus on research output due to the prevailing "Publish or Perish" syndrome, sometimes overlooking other aspects of their job description, such as mentorship, teaching, and service. For many scholars, particularly those in tenure-track

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positions, there is an expectation of regular publication, which has been positively correlated with career advancement. This implies that, these days, professors are less likely to teach actively in the classroom or engage with students; instead, they often spend most of their time working to meet publication targets, confined to their offices or research labs. You know what is sad? Even though you have a passion for teaching, you cannot deny that some of your teaching time is taken up by your desire to write and publish, which ultimately ruins the quality of instruction.

Indeed, one of the main issues is the impact of such pressure on you as a teacher desiring promotion, having to balance your demanding career and family responsibilities. To meet the publication calendar, a professor often spends a considerable amount of time conducting research, reading, writing, and submitting articles to journals. These activities, added to teaching obligations, frequently result in an unbearable workload. As a result, a cultural norm has evolved, characterized by long hours, sleepless nights, and no concept of time off. Am I right? Herein may lie the stress, exhaustion, and even burnout that working mothers and fathers experience when balancing work and daycare, as work and family responsibilities often clash and step on each other's toes.

Do you also share the same concern and pain as these faculty members who report that the need to publish most affects their family time, especially when conducting research? This is particularly true for

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young scholars who are often expected to start families or take on new responsibilities—there is a higher “publish or perish” than in the middle or end stages of their careers. This disproportion is detrimental not only to the personal relationships but also to the general well-being of the individuals.

1. The Tragic Trade-Off: Sacrificing Teaching Time and Quality for the Pressure to Publish

One of the most crucial, yet frequently neglected, consequences of the pressure to publish on you as a teacher is the decline in the quality of teaching. While faculty are still engaged in the critical area of teaching, it tends to become less important due to research obligations. The conflicting expectations lead to you focusing on your research output, even if it means little or no time is devoted to preparing class materials, engaging students in active learning, and fulfilling other teaching responsibilities. In the most severe instances, the publication pressure may result to a complete disregard for students, either because they are simply not around or because the focus is entirely on writing papers.

Again, expectations for university educators is to publish in reputable journals and apply for research grants may result in you better engagement in research than teaching, course content revisions or teacher training programs. I know you have to put in effort to write and neglect some of your teaching time just to meet the requirements for promotion. When

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research is highly valued, teaching is often relegated to the periphery. This can create other issues for the learners, for instance the course materials may be out of date, the professors may not be present during all the available office hours or may be disengaged with their students, all of which does not create a conducive learning environment.

2. The Silent Cost of the Pressure to Publish: Neglecting Mental Health and Emotional Well-being

All this pressure, almost relentless in the case of publishing will hurt the professors' mental well-being. Maybe you are experiencing anxiety, depression, and stress because of presenteeism to produce research work up to that level that is observable externally. The academic world is one where the fame of one professor may be pegged at the number of peers they outrun and this in turn provides an unhealthy sense of competition. For example, one's position when in the tenure track is largely attained, and the fear of 'never retire' as a coined phrase often attaches distress.

The effects according to the mental health Researchers are even worse in areas where the number of publications regardless of quality carries significant weight. When working in such an environment, a professor may dread that failure will lead to not publishing and this may result into feelings of worthlessness and exhaustion. Do you feel the same emotion? The psychological burden may provoke

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health-related issues like failure to sleep in good time, ailments brought about by pressure and in the long run chronic heart diseases as a result of working too much for quite some time.

3. I Teach and Serve, Yet I Was not Promoted: Is Research Publication Truly Valued More?

The culture of academic competitions where research output is anointed as the paramount standard for measuring an academic's success has the unfortunate effect of marginalizing other dimensions of a professor's work, especially teaching and service. Professors whose focus lies in the classroom or those who carry the banner of their academic community in many activities may still be viewed as misfits or misplaced gambits when tenure or promotion decisions are being made. In its place, publications are elevated, leaving out characters who can otherwise contribute to students, the institution, the academic community as a whole, and so forth, other than writing success stories.

Many such service activities which may include committee work, mentorship, peer review or organizing academic events are often seen as a second tier to research. They, however, are the backbone of most academic departments and scholar networks. A culture that does not value teaching and service creates a skewed perception on the ideal academic who is a professor and gratitude for research output becomes the primary focus even at the expense of well roundedness in the academic environment for

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academics and students alike.

4. The Heartbreaking Ethical Dilemma: The Growing Risk of Research Misconduct

The Publish or Perish syndrome is pervasive in academia and may tempt the professor to compromise on ethical standards in order to meet pressuring targets. In the quest for more publications, some also indulge in ‘cutting the salami’, where they divide a research work into unnecessary smaller works for the sake of publication. This strategy is equally damaging as it compromises the authenticity of the research record while minimizing the applicability of the research.

Moreover, in order to achieve the desire of publishing in reputable journals, some professors do engage in unethical means publishing such as hardware misuses, that is, data manipulation, results cut and paste and in other instances, copying other peoples work. There are, of course, not a large number of such cases present. Nonetheless, given the thirst for accomplishment in academic precepts, and with journals’ placements conferring esteem to their authors, some scholars tend to loose their moral compass. The effect of such behavior can be very destructive to the individual academic and the whole academic body as well, eroding credibility and compromising the whole research system.

A study conducted in United State of America with title Publish or perish: academic life as management faculty live it, discussed that A significant majority, 94.0 percent, of the respondents reported feeling pressured to publish in peer-reviewed journals. This overwhelming percentage indicates that the expectation to contribute to academic journals is a dominant factor influencing their professional lives. Of those surveyed, 322 individuals, or 74.0 percent, strongly agreed with the statement, "I feel pressure to publish articles in peer-reviewed journals," while 87 individuals, making up 20.0 percent, also agreed. This data highlights the intense pressure faced by many academics to meet publishing expectations in order to succeed in their careers (Miller et.al, 2011).

Conclusion

They say every scholar has a common affliction and that is the “publish or perish” syndrome, which is a well-known feature of practices in the current academic settings. On the other hand, it is clear that this system causes a lot of troubles for the faculty members, especially for professors and teachers. Hence the challenge of continuously generating research findings may result in severe work–family imbalance, decline in quality of teaching, health complications, and scandalous research activities. Besides, it tends to discriminate against teaching, mentoring, and service which are essential for students and academic health of the institutions.

In order to deal with these problems, it is necessary that colleges and universities reshape their

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assessment strategy for lecturers. For instance, promotion strategies could focus more on the quality and impact of research than its volume, and attention to teaching, mentoring, and service to students could be pulled up. If such a sensible attitude is cultivated in the academia, which recognizes all the three aspects of faculty work, namely research, teaching, and service, and rewards them accordingly, most professors could be able to focus on their work and not get stressed over abandoning their family or students, or compromising their research.

Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How does the pressure to publish influence the quality of research and teaching in academia?
2. In what ways could universities balance the need for publications with supporting faculty's professional development and well-being?

Chapter 2

Administrative Burden and Bureaucracy in Academe

Many people think that teachers are focused only on teaching, which is why they believe teaching is an easy job. However, this is a misconception. I know that, as a teacher, you probably carry a lot of burdens and face challenges, one of which might be having to do tasks that are not part of your teaching responsibilities. But there is nothing you can do except fulfill these duties, hoping they will help you get promoted in the future. However, as a teacher, you cannot deny that your teaching is being neglected because of these other responsibilities, right? Let me discuss it to you.

Well, ever since I started getting deeper into academic institutions, I have come to a conclusion that the administration is really becoming overwhelming increasingly. It was my impression that being in the academic world was about teaching and doing research as well as mentoring — all the activities that I truly love. But at some point, it seems there has been a shift in the core of the work towards an incessant stream of paperwork, meetings, and other governance chores. Challenging deadlines, unnecessary paper work, compliance to numerous organizational requirements are beginning to be as demanding as the professional tasks I opted for. Sometimes it even feels as though dealing with paper work is more tiresome than the actual job description.

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Today, academia is caught up with increased teaching, research and student activities but this is often interrupted by growing administrative work and routine bureaucracy. As a result, administrative burden and bureaucratic processes rank high on the list of the problems faced by faculty members, staff, and even students. The increasing layers of administrative responsibilities and complicated rules can be considered a deviation from the principle aims of the universities, which are – to create knowledge and nurture it. Although a degree of administration, to allow for the effective running of an organization, achievement of goals and adhering with government and accreditation agencies, is vital, the level to which this has been adopted into academic life is quite worrying. The problem is not only with the amount of administrative work and processes per se, but it is also related to the quality of life, output and satisfaction with one's job amongst faculty member.

The Growth of Bureaucracy in Academia

In higher education institutions, bureaucracy is understood as the elements, rules and activities that drive the day to day administration of a university, including but not limited to faculty recruitment, budgetary affairs, management of students, enforcing of policies, legitimacy of research activities and the institutions at large. In recent decades, a global shift has been marked by increased administrative structures and positions within higher learning, often resulting from the growing intricacies of the sector, the

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need for stakeholders to be accountable, and most importantly the need to attract and sustain external resources.

It is unquestionable that administrative services relative to students, finances, or the law, among other areas, are necessary. Nevertheless, the needs fast growth of the bureaucratic structure have also placed an additional burden of work on the teaching staff's shoulders. Traditionally, academic staff such as professors and lecturers were mainly professionals engaged in teaching, training, or research. Currently, owing to the changing times and more so the need for more work, most, if not all, of these professionals are also expected to be involved in core or administrative activities. Such responsibilities include, among others, serving on and/or acting for appointed committees, reporting and information dissemination, evaluation and assessment of programs, accreditation compliance, involvement in strategy development, as well as overseeing the management of research grants, etc.

The increase in ranks of individuals holding titles such as deans or directors and vice presidents has also played its part in this. Administrators may offer vital leadership and supportive roles, but the increase in the number of administrative personnel together with the increase in top down management has led to the creation of a top heavy institution whereby decision making is done by the few who are very likely to have little or no relations with the

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faculty and students. This has in many cases resulted in the feeling that the university is a business and over administration blurs the academic focus of teaching and research.

The Nature of Administrative Burden for Faculty Members

1. Committee Work and Governance Responsibilities

One of the more prevalent forms of administrative load for professors is attending university committee meetings. While the existence of such committees is necessary for the jurisdiction of educational institutions, it is not uncommon to find faculty members enrolled in quite several committees from the departmental ones to the university boards. These panels cover a number of issues including but not limited to curriculum design, faculty recruitment and retention, budgeting and finances, accreditation, student behavior, and general policy making.

Nevertheless, committee work tends to be underrated in terms of time allocated, pay given and this can easily lead to distraction from the primary academic work. Faculty members are usually asked, nominated or volunteer to serve on committees, they do not often get time off their teaching or research for this type of work. In the end, faculty members tend to put in a lot more hours than the instruction time includes by doing things such as attending meetings, reading and writing reports and discussing matters

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related to institutional governance

2. Accreditation and Compliance Requirements Academic

Institutions operate in an environment where there exist very complex processes of accreditation and compliance, which in most instances are imposed by external regulating bodies or government agencies. Accreditation is a necessary process worth engaging in as it guarantees the standards of the universities being certified; however this process carries a lot of weight in terms of the human resource. Mission and Vision statements would not make any sense without a self-study assessment, and faculty members are then called upon to participate in these assessment stages to compile student outcome, course evaluation, and other program effectiveness data. Those who are oftentimes charged to kill the rat, so to say, and turning in the teaching portfolios along with the courses they teach with each syllabi constraints, and assessments and all standards attached are ordered to reproachfully work on discrepancies between their outputs and Log intended.

Getting ready for accreditation can turn out to be a very difficult administrative task; for it consists powerfully of all internal and external justified arguments and statistics that suck research and teaching periods. In addition, when it comes to faculty teaching, they must provide evidence that what they are teaching, their course aims, and their program of

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study meets the requirements set by the accreditors. For numerous instructors, this is understandable because of the most optimal way of preserving their energy to make the micromanaging seem more pleasing than it is, and enhances none of the increasing educational quality concerned issues, at least in a massive scale.

What is troubling here is when the necessary documents are not available, you end up creating documents with no real basis just to meet the parameters for accreditation. The real question is: Are we truly focused on the quality of education, or are we more concerned with the recognition that we've passed the highest level of accreditation, even when some of the documents we submitted are not truthful?

3. Grant Writing and Research Administration

The funding of research projects is a fundamental component in the academic life of a faculty member especially in institutions where research has a high demand. However, the writing of the actual grant proposals and managing the research grants has now become a tedious process full of red tapes. Most of the times, faculty members are expected to adhere to rigid procedures when preparing and filling in grants, which include stratified and detailed budgeting, compliance and institutional approval levels.

This process in itself is highly labor intensive,

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but together with other restrictive processes that surround it added to other simple things can make the situation more complicated. There are research offices within most universities where faculty members go for assistance in the application of grants, however, these offices tend to be inefficient and involving where the faculty has to fill forms, sign contracts, and get signatures for the institution. Such steps serve to clog the research process and tend to add pressure on professors.

4. Administrative Reporting and Documentation

Academic faculty members are becoming more and more encumbered with expectations of filing regular reports and documentation about several institutional aspects. That may include planning and reporting on academic teaching, student learning, research activities, and community services, among others. Such reports are usually gathered by the management for reasons of accountability and performance assessment.

There are no two ways about it; documentation is a normal part of the operations of institutions. But that can be taken to mean that the extents of the required documentation can be excessive at times. There is a need for the faculty members to monitor and report many aspects, including but not limited to attendance, grades, course outcomes, and student evaluations. For a good number of professors, the unending mountain of these paperwork is quite

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unbearable and takes away the time and energy that could be put toward their research or the classroom, quite rightly so.

5. Technology and Data Management

Technology has its advantages and disadvantages in teaching and learning. The advantages are obvious: technology is integrated into the curriculum in various forms and greater ease of access to learning resources is experienced. However, the adoption of learning management systems (LMS) and learning analytics, amongst other technologies, has posed new complex organizational issues. Therefore, faculty members are expected to attend classes, teach students, enter grades, track student achievement, overstudy for the sake of the institution, and so on, across different tech resources, aggrieving them in the process.

Furthermore, the academic institutions are committed to improvement and therefore seeking teaching effectiveness, student satisfaction and learning outcomes data from academic staff. Teaching faculty may also find themselves taking part in such projects and since their teaching is evaluated in this way, they are expected to answer surveys, and attend focus groups. Such data and evaluation processes heighten the perception of activities of managing and measuring the outcomes of the instructional processes as more bureaucratic, and even unnecessary among the professors who are already bogged down with

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administrative responsibilities.

Impact of Administrative Burden on Faculty Well-Being and Academic Work

The rise in the administrative workload, however, comes with serious implications for the well-being, work-life balance, and job satisfaction of the faculty members. Here are some of the relevant issues:

1. Burnout and Job Dissatisfaction

Especially when administrative burdens are added to an already intense situation of teaching, researching, serving, and bringing up other academic responsibilities, faculty are trapped within multiple role expectations. The addition of administrative functions leads to burnout among the faculty. The balance of so many functions can be actually draining thereby creating lowered output and a feeling of too much pressure. In this way, such factors can hinder researchers from engaging themselves in any worthy research and even cut down on the quality of teaching services offered.

2. Deterioration of Teaching Standards Due to Increasing Administrative Responsibilities.

It has been noted that due to the increased administrative responsibilities academics undertake, there is little or no time remaining for course preparation, contact with students, and teaching some

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aspects of the course. Under such conditions, the quality of teaching is likely to be compromised, especially where the faculty is duty bound by numerous meetings, formal reports, and other onerous responsibilities. Being busy with bureaucratic chores; the lectures may not have time or interest to try anything new, and work with students, which is a loss to the educational process.

3. Disconnection with the functions of Research in academia

In many ways, research is one of the basic purposes of any academic institution. However, with increased bureaucracy comes other issues that impede a faculty member's ability to do any relevant research. In addition, professors are more often than before asked to obtain outside grants, oversee research, and prepare reports on the status of research efforts. These may take away from the time when research could need to be done. Because of this, it may be necessary for them to cut down on the time they would otherwise devote to research, thus resulting in less productivity and dissatisfaction with the work.

4. Disintegration of Collegiality

Though academics are typically engaged in collaborative efforts, the increasing bureaucratization of the contemporary university system can create a somewhat compartmentalized atmosphere. The modern faculty seems to be increasingly preoccupied

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with personal administrative duties, which, however, does not afford room for fellowship, guidance and group work. Even the desire to create an academic environment may result in purely managerial approaches where academic productivity takes precedence over creativity and freedom to explore ideas.

Consequences for Higher Education Institutions

The increasing administrative burden and the encroachment of bureaucracy in the academia have ripple effects on institutions of higher learning and the higher education systems as a whole. First of all, the ever growing focus on administrative duties takes away the core purpose of the universities, which is the development and sharing of knowledge. When the majority of the time of faculty members is taken up by compliance and reporting as opposed to carrying out research or teaching, the quality of education and scholarship is bound to decline. This would create threats to the institutions in terms of the quality of education of students and their image.

Furthermore, the ability of universities to cope with new threats and opportunities appears to be decreasing. The requirement to undergo long and tedious procedures can hinder decision-making processes such that it becomes difficult even for the institution to come up with new ideas or embrace any changes. In an era where the academic landscape is global and fluid, such rigidities become a disadvantage

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to the universities than any other institution within certain countries or regions that have uncluttered administrative structures.

The increasing prominence of administrative bureaucracy has financial consequences for universities as well. Even though administrators claim that compliance and accountability mechanisms are essential for sound financial practices, there are hefty costs involved in running a large number of bureaucrats and complex bureaucratic machinery. This may lead to reallocation of resources from the primary functions of education towards the cutting down of teaching personnel, research grants or auxiliary services for enrolled students. In some instances, however, universities tend to concentrate on their internal workings more than on the educational objectives for which they were created.

A study conducted in Pakistan identified six key factors that reflect the administrative burdens experienced by assistant professors. First, "Administrative as an Extra Responsibility" highlights the additional workload that faculty members must take on outside their primary teaching and research duties. This added responsibility can be overwhelming, as assistant professors are often expected to manage administrative tasks in addition to their academic duties. The factor "Administrative Responsibilities" further details the scope of these tasks, which may include committee work, departmental management, and other non-teaching duties, requiring a significant

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amount of time and effort. "Research-Related Responsibilities" also plays a role, as assistant professors often face the challenge of balancing research with administrative demands, leading to possible compromises in their ability to focus on scholarly pursuits (Noureeen&Asad, 2024).

Conclusion

The escalating administrative responsibilities and increasing bureaucracy in the academic sphere pose grave concerns for the faculty, students and higher educational institutions in general. True that some degree of supervision will be required to achieve the desired efficiency and accountability of the institutions, but the current trend of excessive bureaucratization is antithetical to the primary roles of the universities, which are; teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge. Faculty members are experiencing high pressures of work that hinder them from engaging in the academic activities for which they were trained, resulting in stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction. In addition, the culture obsessed with compliance and uniformity in metrics has the danger of killing creativity and academic freedom. Lastly, the ever-growing expenditure that is applied to the enhancement of the so-called bureaucracy ends up giving more priorities and emphasis to issues other than teaching and research, which goes against the very purpose of the existence of universities. Combatting and remedying these instances calls for a rethinking of the ratio of administration to academic

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work where there will be less emphasis on bureaucracy in order to enhance the primary objectives of higher education.

Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How does the administrative burden on faculty impact their ability to focus on teaching and research?
2. What reforms could be implemented to reduce bureaucratic red tape and allow faculty to be more effective in their roles?

Chapter 3

Mental Health Issues and Stress in Academia: A Deep Dive into the Struggles of Faculty Members

I have been feeling a sort of heaviness, without being able to point a finger at why. And this is not simply about the pressure of deadlines or volumes of work to release; it is everything that comes with it. I never imagined how much of expectations and bureaucratic work would be the case before I joined. It is not that I am afraid of doing the job as it ought to be done; the pressure is what fights me. Yet there is an emotional price to all that, which does not get discussed. There is this expectation that one must be 'on' at all times, that one must not only be engaged in work but also be impeccably so across all dimensions of work. I am expected to exclude no component from being handled perfectly: grading, advising, publishing and being there for my students, yet this is 'me' who is suppressed in terms of how all this inflicts me internally. I wonder most of the time how long more can I act as though all is well, while I know very well that I am constantly tensed, anxious and overwhelmed.

I cannot help thinking that such feelings can't be unique to me. Most of my coworkers find themselves in the same situation, battling anxiety, burnouts, and sometimes depression. But they are still bound to the culture of academia and that is thinking

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that they can overcome it without showing any sign of a weakness. We are asked to devote a large percentage of ourselves to our students, to our research, yet there is hardly ever any time to do so for ourselves. That is the kind of pressure which makes one feel very much on their own and refuses to bow out. And the worst part of it is the guilt which comes with it, guilt for being this way, guilt for not being able to control it, and also guilt for not being able to uphold the image of an academic who has no challenges at all. Well, no such, while this is quite a burden to carry about, I must recognize the fact that this cannot continue and if we don't change practices we shall begin to...

Let me discuss it more...

It is common for people to think of the world of Academia as purely educational and the pursuit of knowledge where various teachers, learners, and research scholars are actively involved. Unfortunately, the surface information about academics and their associated activities is disturbing: many of them have to deal with mental health issues on a daily basis. There is a widespread tragedy of stress, anxiety, and depression behind the so-called glamorous face of brilliant speeches and award-winning publications as the university teachers face extreme workloads, the press to publish or perish, dreading job loss, and exclusion from their peers. These pressures may leave a sense of disorientation, physical as well as mental exhaustion, and emotional depletion among most faculty while they often remain enmeshed in their

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struggles.

In this context, we will focus on mental health challenges faced by academic professionals and how the structure of the system aggravates these challenges, and how the emotional costs to scholars working within such a system become extensive. The purpose of the investigation is to understand the scope of the problem, the seriousness that it poses in regard to mental health and the relevance of these issues in the context of higher education.

The Crushing Weight of Expectations

While they may be perceived as people who easily balance the trinity of teaching, research, and school service, academics are active individuals in intellectual settings. However, this view is superficial since it ignores the everyday burdens of responsibilities to which faculty members are expected to subject themselves. These expectations are however uncharacteristic of most professions. Most faculties are expected to multi-task, performing excellently in all aspects of the job description: publishing articles, applying for research funding, teaching classes, supervising students, attending to administrative duties, and many more. In such a precarious situation, stress and fatigue become unavoidable and many faculty members are overstretched almost to the breaking point.

For many, this begins with the pressure to

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publish. The prevalent school of thought among academicians is 'publish or perish'. Most scholars have to deal with that reality on a daily basis. And especially early-career ones. It is a debilitating loop of vexing emotions where the individuals pump in excessive hours in wish to generate research work of the highest journal standards. This becomes debilitating in the end. Every manuscript ready for submission, each grant application written, is an evaluation of them as an academic. For those on the tenure track, such symptoms become even more pronounced. Their ability to get published in high profile journals directly impacts their job security, chances of getting promotion in future and even the perception they have of themselves as professionals disadvantages them.

However, it's not only the load of work which counts; the level of execution matters as well. Inferiority complex popularly referred to as Imposter syndrome is consistent among many of the faculty members where they feel that they do not measure up to their position even though their achievements show otherwise. This worn-out feeling tends to be worse especially when a person is made to feel inferior in a society when other people look impressive and flourishing. The fear is internalized and silent however; as one does not want to be convicted of being a fraud in a field where knowledge and publication is everything (and anyone can be anyone).

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The Emotional Toll of Work-Life Imbalance

Another pertinent issue contributing to stress and mental health change in academics is the work-life balance. This is because the pressure ascribed to academics does not allow much of personal time and as it were for other faculties, work and home situations do not also have clear boundaries. The quests for publication and assignment completion have made most academics stay awake at night at the expense of cerebral rest and bonding with family. The endless cycle of the emails that one has to respond, the assignments that need to be marked, and management duties leaves no room for relaxation. In many instances, the faculty members will, unfortunately, disregard their mental and physical well-being in order to fulfill their job obligations.

This discrepancy is also felt in the net the relationships of the concerned. As for the faculty members with families, the guilt of not being present in certain key family functions always looms in them, as single academics attempt to live with the loneliness devoid of such events. The emotional toll of putting personal happiness on the shelf for the advancement of one's career is scarcely mentioned but is vividly experienced by many. In the peaceful timelines where there is nothing to grade and no meetings, the burden can become too much regarding the respect expected of this loss. Mentoring and teaching in higher learning

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nourishes the trappings of success in a way that causes a terrific impact on health and hardly leaves room for interactions with the loved ones.

The Silent Struggles: Anxiety, Burnout, and Depression

The systematic effects of academia often result in mental health problems; stress, anxiety, burnout and depression are some of the most prevalent ones. Within the last few years, Academic burnout has also emerged as an issue of concern to many. As defined, it entails exhaustion and withdrawal from work along with feelings of ineffectiveness. The expectations of working and the responsibilities that are devoid of termination forces the members of faculties to be totally exhausted, mentally and even physically. FMF (faculty-mixed flooding) for many, is akin to a gradual, invasive, crippling disease which gradually saps the motivation to work, interact with students and doing simple activities that once were sources of happiness.

But then there is also the inescapable anxiety that comes from living an academic life. The job entails keeping deadlines, the obsession with getting published, and job anxiety leading to post stress syndromes which has even led to some people quitting the addictions themselves. To a few, it is quite alterable. Because one cannot "switch off" the mind, there arises difficulty in sleeping most especially at night, low concentration and high stress levels in the day time. The stress that accompanies the academic

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life of a university faculty can be likened to a turbulent weather condition where there are never-ending waves of stress and anxiety bludgeoning the mental capacity of faculty members.

Within the walls of education, depression is yet another significant problem. Faculty members are mostly lonely or work in a cutthroat environment and are often beset by sadness, hopelessness, and self-pity. The system of education is often individualistic with little regard for teamwork and this fosters feelings of loneliness and isolation. These emotions are made worse by the endless focus on other colleagues who seem to be doing better. For a lot of people, these emotions become heavy and affect them greatly, while the nature of the academic world makes an individual feel hopeless.

A Call for Change: Supporting Faculty Mental Health

When it comes to the mental health problems of teachers and researchers, these should not be the case, as they are caused by a system in which what matters above everything is production. There is an urgent need to address the crisis, and mental health of the constituency ought to be ranked higher than ever before. Institutions should understand how these problems, along with stress and anxiety, contribute to academic performance and arrangement for appropriate help. This may involve undertaking measures such as assisting with counselling, having a mentorship program put in place, and promoting a

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favorable working environment that embraces healthy working habits.

This thesis also has to be reformulated in terms of how it understands and assesses students' academic accomplishments. In order to avoid this, teaching or mentoring should be emphasized in addition to publishing papers and administering grant funds.

Moreover, it is also important to tackle the issue of job security. More efforts should be geared towards creating more full-time employment opportunities for the academic staff in the universities and that the adjuncts are compensated equally well and availed with the necessary services. It is unreasonable for the faculty to have to compromise on their financial wellbeing while still pursuing their interests in teaching and research.

The systematic review conducted by Ab Wahab (2024) shows the demands of administrative tasks place a significant mental burden on college teachers, as these duties often require time and attention that could otherwise be dedicated to teaching or research. Administrative responsibilities, such as grading, student record-keeping, and attending meetings, can be repetitive and time-consuming, leaving teachers feeling overwhelmed and mentally fatigued. The constant pressure to stay on top of these tasks, especially during peak periods, can lead to stress, anxiety, and a sense of losing control over one's professional life. This administrative overload often

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results in teachers having little time for personal relaxation or self-care, which further contributes to mental exhaustion and burnout.

Conclusion

In education and research, mental health issues arise mainly due to the nature of the job itself, such as excessive workload, constant pressure to publish, lack of job security, and seclusion. As a result, these factors take a toll on the psychological health of the faculty, resulting in them being psychologically battered and hopeless. Notwithstanding, this tragedy does not have to happen; it is created by factors or conditions which can be modified by malice or will. Allowing for the cultivation of a positive ethos, introducing mental health resources , and adjusting the criteria used to gauge academic performance, faculties would be able to ease the strain they put on their staff, in turn, making the academic sphere more nurturing and humane.

Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How can universities create a supportive environment that prioritizes mental health and well-being for faculty?
2. What role does academic culture play in exacerbating mental health issues, and how can it be changed?

Chapter 4

The Lack of Legal Protection for Teachers: A Dangerous Reality

I have been wondering for quite some time now about the interesting position that teachers find themselves in regarding complaints from students, and to be honest, that is a bit scary. In universities exist a problem that concerns every educator: there is practically no legal protection against malicious and defamatory complaints about a teacher's actions, quite the opposite of a practicing lawyer's life. I have watched it happen to some people, and it feels like we are always on the edge because we know that there is a thin line of thin student complaints that may or may not be justified that can ruin one's career. It feels as if we have been placed out in the wild and told to survive without any provisions. Which is even more unreasonable, there can be a completely anonymous system of complaints, which means that anyone can say anything, and then you have to defend yourself without knowing what is the charge against you. It is difficult drawing it out, but you do feel it, the powerlessness when you are enclosed in something like that.

What is especially worrisome is the fact that, in the absence of adequate legal provisions, the onus of proof is usually on us. I have seen my fellow friends

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and workmates suffer at the hands of the administration for just one complaint, where the institution hardly offered assistance. There are no provisions in place for us when false claims, or worse, malicious claims are made against us. There is also this perception that teachers should simply bear it when students voice their grievances irrespective of whether such a course of action is warranted or not, and this also leads to prolonged drawn-out war of sorts that is tiresome both emotionally and professionally. It is sad to note that this has also gone unanswered. In most business fields, there are well-defined statutes to safeguard employees against discrimination and other offenses, however, in education, there are no such statutes to protect educators. It brings psychological hindrance to us as we are always paranoid of where we are, or what comes out of our mouths for the fear that even a single complaint could destroy all the good reputations and careers we have worked for. It is quite difficult to have any sense of safety in such a system—where everything is so lopsided in favor of the injustice meted out, and there are no laws to assist one in dealing with such unfairness.

Additionally, the problems of student behavior and disengagement, faculty members have to deal with an even more controversial problem - the lack of security from their own institutions. It is commonly observed in many educational institutions that when there are any complaints made by the students, the management is more eager to support the complaint making students, leaving the faculty to deal with

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inconsiderate and disruptive behaviors on their own. This type of situation generates a climate in which teachers are exposed to threats and feel that there is no one to support them.

Often, the teachers are left alone to solve the problems of student misbehavior and they do not get any support from the administration. The dilemmas are especially grievous for the faculty, who may have to contend with a disruptive or disrespectful student in the classroom, often without assistance. Even worse, where a student makes a complaint against a teacher, justifiable or not, the teachers are struck into an exhausting 'defend yourself' mode which, for the most part, has no constructive support from the institution.

The absence of this protection is heartbreaking. Teachers already face the challenge of controlling disruptive behavior in the classroom, but worrying about being undercut by the higher-ups makes it worse. Faculty members operate under a permanent state of impending doom where everything they do is scrutinized, and any act of frustration or misinterpretation could bring about an accusation that threatens their jobs. The effects are severe as even maintaining one's sanity is a fight due to the constant attacks on one's professionalism and the need to earn a living.

Often, there is an unwillingness on the part of teachers to confront issues concerning students directly, owing to the fear of the students and the

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administration. They tread with caution, being careful not to overly discipline so as not to be accused of oppression. Such absence of institutional backing naturally leads to irritation and anxiety. There are no allies or consolations as members hierarchically feel they are left to fight within the class and beyond with no cover from the organization.

The Legal Void: No Laws to Protect Teachers

An additional worrisome aspect is the absence of laws that safeguard the academic staff from bullying, victimization, and emotional stress due to students' attitudes. Though there are legislations that sufficiently protect students from maltreatment or unfair treatment, there exists considerable legislation devoid of protection for faculty who work in difficult or hostile conditions. Teachers who are abused by students or unassisted by the management have limited legal options to address the situation.

In some instances, there are situations in which faculty discipline a student or uphold academic standards only to find themselves at the receiving end of harassment or other misconduct charges. In the absence of any clear protections, however, they are left open to such accusations. This uncertainty in the law creates an excessive emotional burden on teachers, as they cannot engage student behavior or classroom management issues without the risk of being sued. This creates a hostile environment for teachers, as institutions provide no protection and the laws on

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teaching are unclear. As a result, it is the teachers who are now being targeted, instead of the students.

Student Behavior and Engagement Issues in Academia: A Cry for Change

Infusing knowledge, guiding and molding generations is a heavier responsibility, perhaps, than any other. Yet, tucked within the most honorable profession in the world is the untold burden that most teachers today bear and which is more relative silence from the administrators, policymakers, and even society. The issues of misbehavior, apathy, and extreme neglect of help for teachers in dealing with these issues, create a very toxic and mentally draining atmosphere in the education sector.

As these behavioral dynamics evolve, there seems never to be any strategy or systems put in place to foster the healing that is required for many teachers and learners. In the recent past decades almost all routines and behaviors have become difficult for the students and the people around them and left the teachers carrying along the side effects of disturbed climates in their classrooms due to disruptions, disrespect conduct, and class laziness. This burden is made worse by the idea that those at the top who are supposed to help have turned out to be no help at all to the problem which they think is exaggerated. Hence, a performance that is run by teachers who appear to be addressing such issues but who are truly doubtful and wishing for better days instead is the outcome.

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The Erosion of Respect: Student Behavior and the Strain on Educators

Mark my words, in today's world of educational institutions, there are so many student behavior issues that they have become a major challenge to the teaching fraternity. Disruptions are not unusual anymore; they have become the order of the day. From students who cannot focus on the lecture and instead fondly think of their phones and social media to verbal abuses and contests of wills as what back-and-forth defiance and refusal of orders, speaking ill of teachers (albeit close to them) has become an expectation in so-called classrooms.

It is not only issues of classroom management but the respect that each party owes the other is waning while students are becoming more and more entitled. Most of the teaching staff are the ones who have students who are grossly undisciplined and are nonchalantly challenging teachers to do something about it. It is a common tendency in contemporary society to support a notion that every client must be treated with utmost respect at any cost, and this appears to have found its way into the education system whereby a section of students believes that as long as they pay school fees, they can dictate to the professors how things ought to be done.

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This leads to an emotionally exhausting experience for the instructors. Picture this - you are teaching the most important topic in class, and there is a sparsely populated audience that is either bored or resistant to your teaching. The educators commit their resources, energy, and zeal into the execution of their duties, and more often than not, to the extent of their private lives and health. For the faculty, when they notice students taking such efforts for granted, it can undoubtedly be very disappointing and disheartening. One gets the feeling that despite being a teacher, one is worn out, as if one is undermining and doubting one's capabilities of making a positive difference in the lives of the students. There is a sense of frustration, and proper showing of respect becoming a repetitive task takes an emotional effect that may result in burnout, loss of confidence, and loss of meaning in what one does.

Student Disengagement: The Silent Crisis in Academia

A disengagement is yet another woven thread that goes against the very core of the educational process. There are cases in classrooms when students do not take part in class activities and they do not cause any trouble, however, this attitude is also a problem of the same scale. When there is a high level of disinterest in the subject matter by the students, it becomes very hard, if not impossible, for the teachers to keep the class going. The problem faced by the teachers is not only teaching but how to deal with

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children who have so many things that can easily distract them such as their personal problems, society, and the current tech age.

A number of teachers express the sense of community in the learning environment, where the gap between themselves and the pupils has been even larger. It is rather challenging to deliver a lesson because students have every piece of technology with them at all times and are therefore always able to communicate with another person and not focus on the lesson. Smartphones buzzing to receive text messages, students turning on their laptops to check their mails, and the addicted approach of social networking during the session are quite distracting. Any efforts to initiate any productive interaction, encourage constructive debates, or develop higher level thinking skills are usually met with awkward silence or poorly executed attempts to participate.

The effects of disengagement are highly damaging emotionally. A lot of teachers would regard the classroom as a place where they invest their heart and energy in a bid to touch the lives of the students. It can be disheartening to witness such attempts being met with nonchalance. Teachers regard their efforts as futile, their work as appreciated and their calling as useless. This lack of engagement – week after week, semester after semester – weighs upon the attrition levels of the faculty members leading to a high degree of frustration and disappointment.

A Call for Change: The Need for Institutional and Legal Reform

The impact on teachers arising from various student behaviors and their dissociation from the school and its activities is not a minor issue; it is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed. In that regard, it is paramount that every university and educational institution take appropriate measures to safeguard its employees and provide them with all the necessary means of performing their work satisfactorily.

Apart from that, the respect, discipline, and authority of teachers should be included in the academic culture; teaching should not be reduced to the mechanical act of delivering content. Teachers need to be appreciated, respected, and enabled to foster a classroom where students would wish to participate and comport themselves appropriately. Last but not least, administration should understand that the teachers are not simply “providers of the service” but a workforce that should be well taken care of for the proper functioning of any academic institution.

Lastly, reforms to the law are necessary to provide teachers with protection from malicious claims, bullying, and workplace abuse. There is a need to implement regulations and provisions that help

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shield faculty from the psychological tension resulting from disruptive students and lack of coordination from the administration. They should not have to concern themselves about the possibility of losing their jobs for speaking out in instances of students' indiscipline; rather they should be encouraged and given the means to ensure that teaching and learning takes place in a safe and conducive atmosphere.

Conclusion

It is common for many educators to feel a strong sense of anger and disappointment about the challenges that students experience, that students are withdrawing from school and that students lack protection both from the school and the law. It is no secret that teachers are passionate about their vocation, committed to the course of shaping their students – the revolutionaries of the future – only, at times, to be apathy-stricken and outclassed by the very students that they have been pouring their energy into. For the faculty, the mental, emotional and professional burden is inordinate and it is a problem which has received little attention for a very long time. The time has come for the educational sector to acknowledge this challenge that has been persistent for many years and start making meaningful changes – changes that will shield the teachers, support their role and allow them to teach and motivate people without fear of reprisals or exhaustion.

Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How does the lack of legal protection for teachers affect their job security and autonomy?
2. What are the potential consequences of inadequate legal protections for faculty in terms of academic freedom and student-teacher relationships?

Chapter 5

Toxic Leadership in Academia: The Silent Epidemic Affecting Teachers and Students Alike

My thoughts have been revolving around the idea that toxic leadership styles present in academia are perhaps the highest form of a silent epidemic and how it feels so exhausting. There is rarely ever anything that is straightforwardly vicious – it is in the undermining, the absence of assistance, the unwillingness of some ‘leaders’ to cease from sleeping and rather pursuing the interests at hand, rather than the welfare of the faculty and students. I have witnessed this, where the activity of decision making is carried out without engaging the people for whom the decision is meant, the people’s voices are not heard and there is the normalization of fear and weariness. It is a sad state because these toxic leaders do not only impact the subordinates in their leeway of control, they corrupt the climate and it ends up affecting the students as well. It leaves most of the academics building and maintaining ubiquitous barriers, terrified of ever voicing dissenting opinions, and in the end, the entire academic ecosystem is compromised. So many gifted and zealous coworkers of mine have already quit because of that. The emotional distress that such a leadership style induces on those working under it is hardly ever mentioned, yet it exists and it is affecting the most important element of any academic

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institutions: the education, the teamwork, and the care that should be rendered to everyone.

In Academia, leadership, however, it should be noted that your title as a PhD holder does not imply accuracy. Relying solely on high credentials can be dangerous, as it may foster arrogance and inhibit imagination and collaboration. You know what? If you use your degree to overpower your people, they may feel undervalued or even invisible due to an overbearing hierarchical culture and closed attitudes toward new ideas and differing opinions. This mindset can hinder vital elements of team dynamics, such as active engagement and constructive feedback. You can be an effective leader if you embody flexibility, empathy, and attentiveness—qualities that go beyond educational credentials and are crucial for fostering an organization's growth in a diverse and global environment. Though this is not new for us Filipinos, as we tend to boast about our educational attainment and see people with PhDs as impressive, let us break this culture. Someone's educational attainment does not mean their ideas are always correct. They can be considered as smart because they have learned a lot, but they are not always right.

Depending too much on your experience and age can harm your team dynamics and leadership. Why do people in positions of authority rely so heavily on their years of expertise or experience? Do you not observe that you might become stubborn and unwilling to accept new ideas, which can limit creativity within your team? This is a toxic leadership mindset. It

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makes your office uncomfortable and unproductive, hindering teamwork. This mindset can cause the team to ignore the input of your younger or less experienced members, leading to disengagement and reduced collaboration. That is why I want to emphasize that experience and age doesn't entitle someone to always be correct. This toxic mindset in leadership can lead to missed opportunities, as outdated methods may not work well in a rapidly changing world. Since experience does not always equate to being right, good leaders should remain open to new ideas and different viewpoints.

Let us talk about it...

Within popular culture, academia tends to be perceived as a place of advancing one's intellect, innovation, and witnessing the acquisition of knowledge. It is said that universities are places where ideas take root, where education radiates in all directions, and where teachers, non-academic staff, and students are given good chances to work for the benefit of society. But propounded statements aside, many members of the academic community suffer from unduly tyrannical leadership which is antithetical to the very existence of that institution. Growing toxic leadership in academia is a problem that has taken root to the detriment of not only academic staff but also students who bring about a toxic atmosphere that hampers invention and teamwork, and even worse, the physical and emotional health of individuals.

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The burden that toxic leadership in the academic sector imposes on individuals is psychological and emotional in equal measure. It undermines trust, lowers morale, promotes exhaustion, and cultivates an environment where silence and fear reign. Most of the time, this toxicity occurs in a multi-tiered arrangement where certain individuals hold sway, such as a department administrator or head, and resorts to manipulation and control of others. The consequences are devastating: they expect unreasonable things from their subordinates, make decisions that do not take into account the existing conditions, and worst of all indulge in emotional violence, discrimination, and other obnoxious practices. Such leadership does not exist in a vacuum, and its impacts cut across the four walls of the classroom, the office, and indeed every other element that is cross-visioned in academicism.

The Cost of Leadership Abuse: Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout

Inevitably, one of the most immediate and damaging repercussions of toxic leadership in academia is the emotional exhaustion and burnout it inflicts on faculty members. Academic leaders often lack the support, respect, and guidance that teachers require, and as a result, teachers are left to their own devices in an already difficult profession. Toxic leadership is generally associated with micromanagement, impossible standards, and absence of appreciation, all of which create an unmanageable

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pressure of stress. The faculty, on the other hand, often finds itself in a paradox seeking to comply with the work obligations yet finding it equally hard to work without the emotional drain inflicted by an unappreciative superior.

The magnitude of such burden can be so high that it can cause burnout syndrome, a psychological, emotional, and physical state of weariness as a result of chronic stress. In the academic world, the concept of “burnout” takes on different dimensions such as: chronic exhaustion, lack of empathy towards students and others, decreased work output and loss of meaning. Certain members of the academic community, notably junior faculty members or part-time instructors, often feel despair when their contributions are unacknowledged or scorned by malignant bosses. There is also an essential internal struggle associated with perpetually being unseen or ignored, which is lacking self-worth and self-confidence. Consequently, there is a faculty that is dissatisfied and unengaged, with the desire to teach and conduct research bled out by anger and bitterness.

Also, the emotional burden of toxic leadership extends to the private sphere. In instances when academic leaders set unrealistic work demands and engage in other forms of dysfunction, their colleagues tend to forfeit time, health, and relationships so as to comply with such unreasonable and unrealistic expectations. They work all night—grading essays, writing lectures, and sitting in on yet another meeting,

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often without any help from the administration. These excessive hours of work serve to undermine the intrinsic worth of the faculty members leading some of them close to a complete breakdown both physically and psychologically. They may also become more isolated, perceiving themselves as mere parts within a system, that takes them in and spits them out to achieve ends over which they have no control.

The Culture of Fear: Hierarchical Power and Intimidation

Toxic leadership phenomenon in academia is more pronounced where there is the abuse of power that usually comes with the hierarchical power structures. Most academic institutions practice a top-down management style which is where only a few at the top make decisions and everyone else (faculty, staff, students) is expected to conform, without participation. With this kind of leadership, comes an atmosphere filled with fear since people are discouraged from expressing themselves, inciting insubordination, or even asking for assistance. There is an awareness among the faculty members that their professional lives are always endangered by the fact that a single mistake or quarrel with a superior could be seriously detrimental.

This kind of insatiable atmosphere, many faculty members feel helpless. They may observe department, course, and student-affecting decisions being rendered that they are not consulted about. The pressure to appease a leader, no matter how

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unreasonable they may be, is often associated with stress, self-doubt, and a general feeling of intimidation. Many professors are perpetually uneasy, feeling ‘on stage’ with their superiors lest they say or do something that could be construed negatively about them. This encourages extreme mutism, wherever there are significant concerns—such as the behavior of students, issues with workloads, or unpleasant policies from the university—considered too risky to voice since no one feels secure or empowered enough to address them.

This environment of fear also breeds suspicion in the individuals within an organization. When leaders do not communicate openly and honestly but use manipulation, favoritism, and coercion instead, the faculty and staff feel disconnected. And trust, one of the most important aspects of any academic institution, diminishes very fast. In this case, faculty members who previously collaborated with the willing colleagues do not do so anymore but rather keep to themselves for fear of being silenced or ostracized for having a different opinion. Because of this, the society becomes crumbled and disorganized where interaction, share of ideas and works typical in any academic field is replaced by selfish ambitions, pride and oppressive forces.

The Impact on Students: A Damaging Ripple Effect

The repercussions of toxic leadership in the academia do not only affect the faculty, but also

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students in a more severe way. Faculty carry the academic weight and when they are emotionally exhausted, detached, or overwhelmed because of destructive leaders, students bear the consequences. In this situation, the faculty may become inattentive or even too diligent, making it hard for them to provide the necessary care and attention to help students achieve educational success. Lectures can get tedious, responses can take ages, and members of the mentoring team can fall into a 'no relationship' situation. With students that, aware of their professors' issues, may lose concentration and border with disengagement also reinforces the disconnection.

In addition, the leadership at such institutions places an emphasis on the importance of everything else apart from the ideals of honesty, collaboration, and respect. Values that students are expected to hold in high regard are compromised in favour of those aimed at protecting projects managed by aggressive administrative personal. When such changes are made, students, who are usually the last to be concerned with practices of such ordering, suffer the most. Outrageous damage occurred given that it's the students in these educational institutions who are supposed to be cared for and empowered instead end up feeling numb, lost and being mistrustful.

The Absence of Support: A System That Fails Teachers

A fundamental aspect of toxic leadership in higher education institutions is the absence of support

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towards the educators. But administrators do not see faculty as the backbone of the institution, rather they treat educators as mere replaceable units of labour. The institutions' disregard of the well-being of faculties is one of the significant causes of discomfort for the teachers. Immense strain is put on faculty members by professional contexts that seldom offer help in identifying relevant resources for enhancement of professional competencies, psychological health, and even appropriate dividing of working hours and rest. Hence, they have to fend for themselves when it comes to the management of their careers and more often than not they only want to survive the oppressive academics that are more often aimed at 'killing' their spirits rather than bringing out the best in them.

Dealing with problematic leadership or even corrosive organizational cultures creates a vexing dilemma for many faculty members with few if any, viable options. Proactive administrators may look more for ways to entrench themselves or shield their image rather than care for the health of those they oversee. Therefore, teachers find themselves in a very lonely and almost despairing environment which adds to the problematic culture of the institution. This unwillingness to attend to the personnel's mental and emotional well-being is an illustration of the poor leadership structural management set up in place.

Breaking the Cycle: A Call for Change

The difficulties surrounding toxic leadership in
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higher education and academia cannot be addressed merely through the modification of an isolated organizational component or by the application of a quick-solution approach. It is a pervasive issue that can only be reimbursed through change, dependency, and grasping the workings of institution in a different way. All educational institutions must ensure that respect, transparency and nurturing cohesion are present so that the workforce does not see itself as disposables worked on, but valued participants who embody the faculty. Those in charge have resources necessary to enhance this sort of treatment and ought to assume responsibilities for their actions while designing systems where faculty are allowed to execute their roles to the fullest without the threat of harassment or bullying.

There are critical implications that toxic leadership in the academic triangle has which, unfortunately, cannot be overlooked. When taught absolutely devoid of integrity or compassion from the leaders, teachers and students, and even the institution, gets hurt in the process. This underlining disease has to be confronted. It is essential to eliminate the poisonous designs within which both the instructors and the learners exist. It is time to design a system that is much more kind and fairer to the emotions of the people involved in academics. Then and only then, can academia be what it was meant to be – a platform for personal and collective growth of educators and students respectively.

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The study of Labrague (2021) discussed Toxic leadership behaviors in the workplace can have a profoundly negative impact on individual workers, leading to a cascade of undesirable job outcomes. When employees are exposed to toxic leadership, they often experience a significant decline in job satisfaction, which directly affects their overall well-being and engagement at work. Toxic leaders may engage in behaviors such as micromanagement, bullying, lack of support, or unfair treatment, which can cause employees to withdraw emotionally from their tasks. As a result, employees may exhibit decreased job involvement, leading to a lack of enthusiasm and effort in their work. The broader organizational impact of toxic leadership is equally detrimental. The presence of toxic leaders can foster a work environment characterized by low morale and poor motivation among employees, which erodes overall team performance and productivity. Toxic leadership often leads to a decline in the quality of work, as employees become less invested in delivering high-quality results due to their negative experiences. The toxic culture that arises from such leadership practices can also compromise the safety and well-being of workers, as trust in leadership and the organization diminishes. Employees are less likely to report issues or adhere to safety protocols in a toxic environment, leading to increased risks within the workplace. Ultimately, toxic leadership creates a cycle of negativity that not only harms individual employees but also undermines the long-term success and health of the organization as a whole.

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Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How does toxic leadership within academic institutions affect the morale and productivity of faculty members?
2. What steps can institutions take to cultivate leadership that fosters collaboration, transparency, and respect?

Chapter 6

The Padrino System in Academia: A Deep-Rooted Problem Undermining Merit and Integrity

Of late, I have also given a lot of thought to the concept of a "padrino system" in academia, and to be forthright, it anger me quite a lot. It is really sad to see how so many people 'make it' in this arena, almost without regard to any gift or effort put in, but rather on who they know or who knows them. I have observed other people who had fewer skills or even experience, but due to their connections were able to get promotions or top projects. On the contrary, other members who truly care about the work, have put in a lot of effort, have only been ignored or pushed to the periphery. This does not concern itself only with the notions of right and wrong, but the very structure and purpose of the institution in question itself. Where such networks of patronage exist, the belief that academic life can be meritocratic loses its meaning. This is unhealthy and demotivating paradigm, and what worse is that it prevents people from taking their rightful place on the ladder.

Let us dive into this issue...

The clientilism popularly known as the 'padrino' system, which has been defined as a social arrangement in which professional advancement relies

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more on social relations and personal favoritism than merit, has persisted in the past and continues to be a major concern in several sectors including; academia. In educational settings, the 'padrino' practice tends to violate fairness, meritocracy, and academic principles. It creates an environment where 'who you know' is as important if not more so than 'what you know' or even 'what you do'.

This phenomenon is oppositional to the western ideals of academic establishments and practice and yet it appears to still be in existence and still remains problematic, severe and debilitating to the healthy functioning of any academic environment. The 'padrino phenomenon' goes beyond individual faculty and includes fatal organizational impacts that affect students, staff, and in fact the entire spectrum of the institution from the teaching classes to the very apex of the administration. This construct poses a danger to the academic institution because it deters the pure essence of intellect and its growth and development.

A Culture of Favoritism: The Impact on Faculty

The patronage system in higher education, as in other sectors, has significant consequences, with the most serious effects on hiring, promotion, and tenure. Rather than compensating individuals for their scholarly accomplishments, teaching, and research, the hiring practices ensure that only those with proper connections or relatives with influential university administrators or senior faculty members get hired.

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Such an environment becomes very unhealthy because rather than focusing on the abilities of an individual, career progression simply depends on one's network of relatives and friends.

Less connected faculty members or those lacking in resourceful mentors, on the other hand, are likely to be shut out from such opportunities as research funding, administrative posts, or departmental leadership. Those already part of the 'inner circle' may be too qualified for levels they have been placed during the recruitment process, while other individuals, more qualified but without the right affiliations, are sidelined. Rather, it creates a culture that runs against the very fabric of talented individuals, turns them against each other, and restricts growth; because faculty members learn that working hard and committing oneself to the cause will mean nothing unless one is in the right circles.

Faculty members who are bypassed because of the padrino system-who systems works through patronage have an emotional cost. Where merit no longer counts and relationships assume priority, injustice and inequity begins to prevail in the academic society. Academics, nurses and teachers, and even university administrators, may feel discontent, anger, and low spirits when they realize that what they do is useless under management that ignores objective performance in favor of bureaucratic favoritism. Such a negative atmosphere creates burnout, absenteeism, and lack of interest among

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teachers who start believing their work is wasted in a system that encourages allegiance in place of excellence.

Administrative Problems: The Lack of Accountability

The patronage system also poses certain problems of an administrative nature. When academic leaders and administrators endorse or hire people because they are friends or relatives and not because of qualifications or performance, it is self-defeating to the institution. There are people appointed to administrative or academic positions who lack the abilities, experience, or vision to effectively sustain the institutions. This can impact the academic quality within the institution over a period of time, its perception by the outside world, and its resources in terms of productive faculty and students.

Further, nepotism also breeds lack of accountability which creates a scenario where corrupt practices are tolerated and even rewarded. Those in authority who practice nepotism are likely to believe that nobody will criticize them for such actions because they will always be in a position to advance or shield associates within the system. This may result in an opaque decision-making process where key decisions on recruitment, financial resource allocations or academic focus are taken discreetly without due process or consideration of who benefits the organization.

Furthermore, this absence of checks over operation discourages any forms of engagement that may involve giving feedback or even criticism as members in the very system fear that they might go against the existing order. When faculty members or students see cases of favoritism or other malpractices, instead of reporting the misconduct, for fear of losing their positions or chances in the future, they opt to keep silent on it, thus contributing more to the problem of corruption and favoritism.

The Long-Term Consequences for Academia

The padrino system in academics has both immediate and long-term implications. Fundamentally, it destroys what higher education is meant to stand for: a sober pursuit of knowledge, promotion on merit, and a level playing field for all. Education and research decline when relationships factor higher than workloads and qualifications. The management of research projects and/or academic programs may be poorly executed or worse, compromised due to the ulterior motives of individuals. Ultimately, not just the institution but its very purpose becomes loss of face; it invites criticism both in the local and the external circles.

In addition, the evil of the padrino system engenders inequity in access to diversity and inclusion on the part of its institutions. People from minority or underprivileged groups which may not have strong ties to any structures as those from majority groups are

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likely to miss out on chances. This worsens social injustices and hinders the different kinds of thoughts and values which are essential for the growth in knowledge and intellectualism in general. Also, even the few faculty members or leaders of different backgrounds, who attempt to be innovative, fit into the existing paradigm. The existing paradigm is usually narrow and quite often homogenous in outlook thereby impairing the universities' ability to respond effectively to the complex issues facing the contemporary globalised world.

Breaking the Cycle: Solutions and Call for Reform

In order to solve the problem of the padrino system, all functions of academic institutions must be based on merit, transparency, and accountability. Fairness ought to be the foundation upon which hiring and promotion processes are built, as well as consideration for other factors like qualifications, accomplishments, and input into the scholarly community, instead of any personal affiliations. Every institution needs to put in place measures that will prevent decision-making processes from being mired in discretion, abused to facilitate some academic bias, and allow for transparency in all crucial academic decisions.

Finally, universities should help create an environment that discourages the practice of favoritism, where protection is offered to students and instructors who report such misconduct. This also

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means that the top management of the university has to be proactive, as the managers are the ones keen on nurturing the desirable environment of equity, belonging, and responsibility. The provision of social equity with regard to access to educational opportunities will lead to improvement of the academic climate and re-establishment of the purpose of education when the system is openly avowed and a paternalistic approach to governance is jettisoned.

The study of Luy and Diaz (2022) found that workplace politics in educational institutions is widespread, impacting teachers in both positive and negative ways depending on their organizational position. Four main themes emerged from participants' experiences: voluminous requirements, unjust selection, nepotism (Padrino system), and gender discrimination. Notably, nepotism was identified as one of the most common and disruptive issues faced by educators. Despite these challenges, many teachers shared how these negative experiences motivated them to pursue professional and personal growth, seeking ways to overcome the limitations imposed by such politics. The study also highlighted the effects of politics on the promotional system within educational institutions, revealing both favorable and unfavorable outcomes. These politics often compromise the effectiveness of teachers in their roles, with participants expressing dissatisfaction with the current promotional processes. Their insights suggested that reforms are necessary to ensure

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fairness, along with the promotion of active participation from all involved. Furthermore, teachers emphasized the importance of fostering both professional and personal development, as these changes would help create a more just and supportive work environment, ultimately enhancing their performance and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The academic patrone system is a chronic malaise that abuses the principles of fairness and academic ethics as well as the very foundation of education. It nurtures a bias where the control of networks is prized above the individuals' skills. The effects are ruinous even for the faculty and students, to say nothing of the organizations themselves, generating feelings of dissatisfaction, alienation, and cynicism toward the system. This is an issue that cannot be ignored and action taken in these institutions to create a fairer, less opaque and less meritless system – one that promotes and preserves the tenets of education and knowledge development.

Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How does the padrino system impact the diversity and fairness of academic hiring and promotions?
2. What strategies can be employed to dismantle patronage networks in academia and promote merit-based decision-making?

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Chapter 7

The Problem of Faculty Teaching Subjects Outside Their Expertise in the Academe

There is something that I have been noticing and it is quite worrying indeed; the increasing paradigm shift of requesting academic staff to teach courses that they are not adequately trained for. It is actually very irritating because looking around me, I have observed teachers who are extremely skilled and knowledgeable in their fields, yet they are often put in situations where they can teach courses that they have no training for, simply because there is no one else available or an empty class has to be populated. The thing is, teaching is an art where one has to possess profound knowledge in order to pull it off convincing well, and if enthusiasm or pedagogy is lacking, that is one thing, but I am quite sure the outcome for the students is quite something else. I am not new to the challenge of teaching courses that fall outside my area of specialization, and while I gave it my utmost effort, it was draining and made me doubt my capacity to deliver the optimum educational experience. Both the students and the teaching staff suffer as a consequence. And it allows for impatience, because when one is overcommitted, there is no room to excel in the specific areas that one enjoys, which is not how it should be in academia.

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Let me discuss it to you...

In most cases, colleges and universities expect faculty members to provide subject specific knowledge and competency. It is assumed that this goes hand-in-hand with their employment in the courses designated in accordance with their training and research experience enabling students to receive, what is desired, education of a correct quality. Unfortunately, there is a growing concern in academic institutions with faculty members being instructed to teach classes that are not in their area of specialty. This affects the education system as a whole because it creates difficulties for the teaching and learning processes and the various stakeholders involved. It does not stop here; the far-reaching effects of this issue extend to teaching and learning processes, academic integrity, the attitude of students and teachers and many others.

Compromised Quality of Education

An immediate and evident effect of requiring faculty members to teach subjects beyond their professional training is the deterioration of the educational standard. Professors are usually recruited to deliver classes in areas that are relevant to their highest attained qualifications — which is often at the doctoral level and the teaching and research activities of the professors enable effective delivery of extensive, relevant and up-to-date knowledge. When faculty members are assigned to teach a course on a subject

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for which they have not been trained, the level of content they are able to provide to the students is usually very limited.

In general, instructors trained in other sciences can introduce the core content of the subject, but their engagement to provide a more detailed discourse and practical use of the subject is greatly futile without the required subject history. This scenario is commonly experienced in advanced courses such as engineering, medicine, and other technical courses oil specific domains. This is because in those courses, even the slightest mistake or misconception while teaching can ripple effects throughout the learning system as the students progress toward higher thoughts building on previous layers of learning.

In addition, students are often aware when their teachers are not comfortable or confident about the subject at hand. This may also cause the pupils to disrespect the teacher, as well as the discipline, thus resulting in a dull and uninterested class. Additionally, their ignorance may lead to incomplete or misleading answers, which may confuse the students and impede their ability to understand the concepts effectively.

The Pitfalls of Faculty Overconfidence in Teaching Outside Their Expertise

As it is the case across all sectors, the incidence of educational faculty exhibiting higher levels of self-

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esteem and participating in courses which they have no previous experience, knowledge and skills, has become a problem. The desire to fit in pushes especially non - educators to venture into areas of teaching where they have scanty knowledge which may suppress growth in education and academic climates. When faculty members start teaching courses in new areas to them, they tend to exaggerate their abilities to handle the course content and concentrate on looking capable rather than educate sufficiently.

This is evidenced by the saying 'better the confidence than the competence,' which is often associated with such scenarios that encourage such shallow teaching as the use of 'broad generalizations' without the 'rich specifics' that the discipline demands. In some extreme cases, they may even mislead the students by giving false information or shallow analysis.

Furthermore, students can also be victims of this over-confidence. They may be taught not by a relevant expert, but rather, by a teacher who does not care about the students getting a deep understanding of the subject, but rather about the teacher's standing in the intellectual community. It is imperative that faculty in the institutions do not know their areas of focus to the extent that they undertake to teach in ancillary areas without any further assistance or seek help from others. This means that the students are guaranteed quality education and at the same time

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creates an attitude of humility and thirst for knowledge among the teaching and learning community.

Solution: Balancing Faculty Expertise with Appropriate Course Assignments

In order to tackle the problem of overconfident faculty teaching non-native subjects, and faculty being forced into teaching areas outside their expertise, universities need to put in place more intelligent course allocation and staff training policies. First, departments must make sure faculty have dedicated courses matching their degrees as well as research interests. This can also mitigate the temptations of teaching unprepared subjects for the sake of seeming more adaptable, promoting the avoidance of shallow teaching instead.

In the case where teachers are requested to teach outside their field of study, the institution should put in place ways like training or mentoring to help the teachers perform effectively. This may include enlisting the help of experts in the area within, or outside the department, to assist the faculty in better understanding the content.

In addition, regular interactions between the faculty and the head of the department with regards to teaching abilities and areas of weaknesses will facilitate the proper allocation of courses improving academic integrity and learning efficiency at the same

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time.

In the study of Canoy et. al. (2022) Teachers assigned to teach subjects outside their specialization face significant challenges, including a lack of instructional materials, limited class time, inadequate resources in the school library, and the pressure of preparing daily lesson logs (DLL). Despite these obstacles, teachers embrace their responsibilities, understanding that it is their duty as mandated by the Department of Education. They demonstrate flexibility by balancing teaching with other tasks.

Reflective Questions for the readers:

- 1. How does being asked to teach outside one's area of expertise impact the quality of education students receive?
- 2. What are the long-term effects on faculty when they are stretched beyond their expertise, and how can institutions support faculty in maintaining their teaching integrity.

Chapter 8

The Serious Problem of College Students with Suicidal Thoughts

I have been weighed down today by the weighty issue of mental health and suicidal thoughts in college students. It is the saddest of all real situations but sadly we do not highlight it as much as it needs to be highlighted. I have seen students-some of them very close to me-who looked perfectly okay from the outside but were struggling with many dark thoughts inside. There is a high stake for them to perform, the continuous tests, assignments, and part-time job searching can be too much pressure, and not always do they have the emotional help or responding mechanisms they can use. It is not only academic pressure, but also there is loneliness as an effect of being far from home, social expectations and at times orientation in the world becomes a problem. What is disturbing is that most of them go unnoticed because we fail to see the warning markers. They do not always ask for help, and when they do, the treatment is often lacking or overburdened.

Students I have talked to have experienced feelings of inadequacy and of not being able to cope any longer. It is really sad to hear a young person saying there is no way out, most especially because there are brighter sides to their lives beyond the stress they are currently having. But the truth is, in most

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cases they feel that they are the only ones struggling with these issues. There is a stigma towards mental health that creates challenges for the students to ask for assistance because it's as if they are expected to be strong and composed. Working in the education sector, one cannot help but feel that there is a lot more that should be done towards helping students who are apparently in distress. It is imperative that we build an environment that allows students to talk about their mental health problems without fear of being looked down upon, and where such students are able to receive adequate help. The desire to perform well in college should not compromise the well-being of students. If these issues are not addressed, students will be lost to a cause that should be controllable with the right care, resources, and support systems.

Let us talk about it...

All over the world, the abnormally high rate of suicide amongst college students is becoming alarming. It is a documented fact that most young adults of college age are suffering from mental issues such as depression, anxiety, and harmful tendencies which result in a worrying increase in suicidal thoughts and actions amongst students. This problem is usually aggravated by the different academic, social, and personal expectations that are common in such higher learning institutions. It is during the university years which are stereotypically deemed youthful and full of adventures that one goes through a series of weighing factors namely education, society and

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approach to maturity. These issues often cause some students feelings of extreme loneliness and hopelessness that can even trigger suicidal thoughts. The focus of this discussion is on the issue of suicidal ideation among the student population, the reasons behind why students suffer from such thoughts and ideas, and most importantly how this phenomenon can be managed and curbed. In order for there to be any meaningful assistance or intervention for students' issues, there is a need to comprehend the various themes that lead to such challenges in mental health.

The Mental Health Crisis Among College Students

Most educational establishments in the current age have seen an increase in the number of students with emotional problems. A lot of research shows that a considerable number of students in college have mental illnesses, for example, stress, bipolar disorder, depression, and suicidal thoughts. As reported, about 25% of college or university students are likely to suffer from a psychiatric disorder while those in colleges have higher rates of suicide. Most of these mental health problems are due to the socionature stigma of seeking for health care, the health compromising kinds of violent, high academic systems in most young people, and the challenges that come with transition to adulthood.

A. Anxiety And Depression Leading To Suicidal Ideation: An Overview

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The disorder which affects young members in a college most probably is one of the varieties of anxiety and depression. Such two disorders appear to go with each and every other disorder which prompts an individual to contemplate suicide in one way or the other. In addition, several factors including the competitive nature of schooling, extracurricular activities, and aspirations for the future can be worrying and therefore stressful to students.

Academic Stress: In an attempt to fulfill the academic requirements, college students are often stressed out due to the reasons such as ensuring firm performance in exams, completing bulky projects, and working towards their career goals among others. Such persistent pressure often culminates to a sense of inadequacy, a desire to give up, and hopelessness. Students who are under pressure for good academic performance may develop the idea that if they do not perform well, all their future plans are worthless. Such drastic emotional change can sometimes lead individuals to consider committing suicide in order to liberate themselves from the stress.

Loneliness: Most college students feel that having a social network and developing friendships enhances their self-esteem and emotional health. However, home (or even high school) social networks tend to be weakened once students move into dorms leading, in many cases, to loneliness and lack of social cohesion. Such students might also feel depressed if they do not belong to any social group. Hopelessness

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and depression are common precursors of suicide and also in these students.

Pressure to Succeed: Among the pressures surrounding most students, if not all, to fit into the social circle, if not to domineer it (friends, peers and so forth) is more so pronounced in the case of first-generation or underprivileged students - those who are likely the first ones within their families to attend institutions for higher education. They are likely to feel an additional burden of expectation that they need to succeed because their family or community would want them to. In the cases when such familial or societal expectations are reached, this can sometimes pressure individuals to the extent of developing suicidal thoughts.

Contributing Factors to Suicidal Thoughts in College Students

a. Academic and Career Pressures

The academic atmosphere present within the walls of colleges and universities is also characterized by an internal strife among the students, the insistent need to meet the expectations set by oneself or others, and the ultimate quest for perfection. For some individuals, this insatiable hunger for achievements, especially academic ones, can foster a sense of deficiency and even failure. A worse degree of this pressure is undergone by students who have some aspirations as far as their grades are concerned, or

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when they are in the process of applying for jobs or internships with loftier profiles following their graduation.

Fear of Failure: The fear of academic failure is one of the most significant contributing factors to suicidal thoughts within college students. Indeed, it can be extremely difficult to shake off the feeling that if one fails to meet the academic standards set up for him or her, he or she will have no chance of securing any opportunity in life. While some think they are disappointing their parents, others believe they are sabotaging their future, which makes death seem a viable alternative.

Imposter Syndrome: This belief of ‘imposter syndrome’ is commonly shared amongst college students in general and especially among high achievers or those who belong to minority groups. It is the belief of not being worthy of their success and their eventual ‘exposure’ as being fake. Such a psychological template has been linked to suicidal ideation since it is responsible for a great level of anxiety, self-doubt, and even depression.

B.Social and Personal Struggles

Students do not merely brace for academic challenges but also personal and social problems, the prevalence of which can greatly affect their mental well-being. Joining college often calls for a change of environment, a shift in social interaction, and the many hurdles that

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come with being on a level where you have to establish your own way of living.

Feeling Alone And Being Alone: Students are believed to be at the corner of school searching for education and making friends for life and nurturing healthy social interactions. Unfortunately, some students are unable to establish such bonds, thus they can experience large disconnections from their fellow human beings and, in some cases, tribes. Many mental health issues have been attributed to social disconnects, which involve strong bouts of loneliness that breed thoughts of self-harm.

Struggles In Relationships: Other students are not spared from the issues in relationships either with regard to family, friends or love interests, which may then spark emotional distress. The feelings of disappointment and inadequacy may arise from family expectations, lack of emotional support and even break-ups and psychically sickening thoughts of wanting to commit suicide may appear.

Self And Identity: College is also a time to engage in self-exploration but to many people, will also include understanding their self, one's beliefs and values. However, for some this has been very difficult and distressing, more so for those dealing with the questions of sex, gender or culture. When one cannot manage such distressful thoughts, especially when there is minimal assistance offered during the transition phase, it is normal to feel tired and lost in

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one's own self.

c. Mental Health Stigma and Lack of Support

When looking at something like mental health awareness campaigns, the compassion gap in research concerning mental health remains and is largely cultural to certain ethnic segments of the societies. Many students feel suicidal or distressed emotionally, but they would rather not ask for help because they know that people do not understand such matters. This aggravating stigma is a barrier for many students in accessing support resources that would address their mental health issues and further aggravate the already prevailing isolation and hopelessness.

Also, some students might have no idea who to seek for assistance or they may even think that counseling services are unavailable. If mental health support systems are poorly equipped economical and manpower, students may be left distressed in a scenario where no help can be sought for addressing mental health issues.

The study of Kabbash et. Al. (2023) revealed that 25.3% of respondents experienced suicidal thoughts, with 12.3% having attempted suicide. Among those who attempted, the leading cause was depression, reported by 61.8%, followed by educational pressures (54.4%) and loneliness (41.2%). These findings highlight the significant impact of mental health challenges,

particularly depression and academic stress, on students' well-being and the need

Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How can faculty members be better equipped to recognize and address signs of mental health struggles among students?
2. What role should academic institutions play in creating a campus environment that prioritizes student mental health, and how can they partner with faculty to do so?

Chapter 9

The Toxic Gossip Culture in Academia: The Emotional Toll of Perfectionism and Personal Invasions

The toxic gossip culture prevalent in academia has been weighing me down lately and it honestly does take an emotional toll. It is a very strange and ugly environment that quiets itself in the shadows. Faculty members, and ions even students, constantly whispering about one another and their lives, engaging in rumor mongering and even backbiting. What bothers me the most is the way this sickness cannot be cured as it is akin to a perfect, zero-defect attitude. One is expected to show up this perfect ideal self both at work and socially. If one makes a mistake or something is 'off' outside the expected social perimeters, word gets around. I have watched as lessons learned in and other petty banter have ripped some of my colleagues worse than bullets, their careers and good names damaged because a few people overstepped their bounds and began talking about them. It is emotionally draining especially when such considerations become self-directed or an irrational fear of people's possible disdain comes upon a person. It is also irritating to be in a system where one is expected to perform perfectly because vulnerabilities or imperfections will be exploited.

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What makes it worse is that within this space, determining who to trust becomes particularly challenging. One begins to feel as though they are perpetually ‘treading’ or walking on thin ice, forever having to doubt and carefully consider every word or action in fear of how these would be twisted or turned against them. I have at times refrained from revealing my personal issues due to the fear that I would be treated as a subject of some kind of ridicule. This is very discouraging because rather than being in a conducive environment where people uplift one another, it is a culture of back stabbing, competition and assessment at all times. The emotional cost of this is not only about the vicious rumors but the anxiety that ensues, the feeling that there is no escaping the gazes of other people who are always watching and judging. This relates to eroding self-confidence and faith in other people with persistence. It is straight impossible to flourish when you operate under such conditions, and progressive ideas and assistance degenerates into a mad spiral of criticism. This is a problem that we must tackle if we desire the academic environment to be an enjoyable one devoid of pressures of achievement or intrusion.

Let me share these things to you...

In academic institutions, ideally defined by extremely focused intellect and knowledge pursuit, exists a persistent albeit dynamic gossip culture meant to spoil relationships and bring down what is supposed to be an amicable regard for collaboration. Not only is

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the academic ideal that is supposed to enhance development, exploration, and mental stimulation compromised by the indentations along the floors, the muttering in the recesses, and shifty glances emanating from the faculty room but also the social aspect of it. These conversations have a relatively low academic value, rather, their aim is to attack other people and destroy their reputations. Academic settings can be quite invasive, and apart from healthy criticism of one's research or teaching, academic gossip can quickly engender hurtful unfounded rumors concerning an individual's private life. Additionally, these conversations also tend to operate under a certain unarticulated decorum—the ideal that there exists a need for every faculty member to be masqueraded and portrayed as perfect and devoid of any imperfections or challenges.

For many educators working within academic circles, the agony of maintaining such outward pretenses is constant. Each essay, each presentation, and each conversation quickly becomes an evaluation that is often quite severe and unjust. It is as though one's entire professional life depends not only on merit but also on an unrealistic facade of purification—quite an expensive decorative veil which one manages to put up, and more so keep up. For us, who tend to be very hard working and even devote years, sometimes many years in the case of women, to such work as that of academia, the ideals of superiority become constrictively salient, while vicious rumor-mongering is in full swing.

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The argument investigates the experience of the system of gossiping in academia. How it affects the working relations of people, the trust between them, and what the environments are like when private lives or character weaknesses become the main focus instead of a person as a whole.

The Pressure to Be Perfect: The Comparison Trap

In most Clear expectations – both overt and covert – exist in academia regarding performance of faculty members, at times they can bear them out. Social perfectionism in this field does not focus on getting the research done on time, on the results, the teaching scores from students. It involves wearing the most presentable face at all times. One has to know everything about their area of expertise, skillfully handle all students, publish books, and maintain an impeccable reputation at the same time. These impossible demands are greatly internalized within the academic system and culture. It appears that the core of academic culture prefers and rewards those individuals who exude an image of being "always in charge," while those who exhibit weakness or difficulties are likely to be ostracized.

I felt this pressure. Even as a young academic, there was an expectation to be omnipresent, a respondent to every need, while producing transformative work. I had to balance teaching,

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addressing the tenure clock, writing up grants and serving on several committees. But more than that, I had to project an image of being in control – as if I was not overwhelmed with everything. I could not afford to let anyone know that I was finding it hard to juggle the demands of work with that of personal life or that I was occasionally dispirited about my academic prospects. The consequences were too high, and I could not afford to have people, who I later found out were equally imperfect, pass judgment on me.

Gossiping About Others: When Personal Life Becomes Public

However, the beauty of the academia does not come alone. Rather the negative aspects outlined within it are the ruinous tendencies of people. It is always those teachers who are in a deep inferiority complex that turn to shark their colleagues for some sense of self-worth. They will hold and take part in conversations that concern the private affairs of their fellow employees, making light of their torments as if acting out in amusement. It is a very sadistic form of punishment, often disguised in tattered cloaks as ‘concern’.

Again, it’s personal. It’s hard to explain the anguish of being backstabbed by whom you thought to be just a regular work-recipient. It brings a melodramatic picture of betrayal within its precincts. I still remem my ‘water cooler’ moments — quietly nattering with colleagues before lectures. Sixth minute

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into the discussion a colleague announcing, “Have you heard gossip about [name]?” while exuding a precious ‘I’m telling you this because it matters’ vibe. I can’t help but recall a similar pattern of my coworkers who could talk about someone’s relationship troubles or break-up in terms almost as casually as they would talk about weather, needless to say making it a gossip goldmine.

There is a blindness here that is hard to overemphasize about such behavior. The same individuals would endlessly lecture about the values of academic honesty, how one should behave in a classroom setting, and encouraging a convivial learning atmosphere. Yet, as far as the relations between them—especially the undisguised animosity towards one another—they were above such morals.

Professors would, for instance, talk behind the back of a colleague and make such harsh comments like “she’s obsessed with the church because her crazy husband left her.” And these remarks were not so much about pity but scorn. Not a single person examines how such personal issues can interfere with one’s professional engagements, let alone the unhealthy emotions that accompany the fights. To subdue it even more, these personal issues became the center of attention to the academic activities. In department occasions, it was at time at odd when the personal troubles of a member would be irrelevant to the meeting. This thing was like a dark cloud cast over everything, something like a power that was

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continuously on your mind and prevented you from trusting everyone.

3. The Dark Side of Perfectionism: A Comparison Mentality

In academic environments, gossip revolves around hierarchical positioning. Being “the best” is equated with being unique and unmatched. In such settings, one’s worth is tied to their latest publication or the number of panels they have shared their work in. Gossip can be seen to suffer from the same ailment: how do I beat you up, instead of lift you up; how do I outdo you by exposing your strengths and weaknesses, and even your personal life or imperfections along the professional? The cleaner a person’s CV reads, the more likely it is that everyone will be aware of their faults. But those of us who find it hard to live up to such ideals, who aren’t “superior,” may find ourselves ostracized or made the topic of malicious talk.

What do you think being subjected to this kind of social hierarchy feels like? It is disheartening to know that no matter how much effort you put in it, it will never be enough. At the beginning of my career, I was full of enthusiasm and ambitions because I thought that everybody else was too. But after some time, I have noticed a disturbing tendency about myself – the more I fought, the more the people surrounding me seemed to enjoy their lives. There

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were coworkers with exemplary research accomplishments, picture-perfect families, and perfectly curated appearances. And here was I, awkwardly wading through the waters of aspiration versus expectation, struggling to find equilibrium between my professional ambition and personal demands. It was like there was a constant assessment and there is no room for mistakes.

The Price We Pay: The Slavery of Rumormongering and the Burden of Perfection

But it is not only cognitive and social burdens; it can also take a physical toll on someone forced to operate on a constant ‘gossiping’ culture and the ceaseless quest for perfection. One’s daily life, that’s probably the hardest thing to put in words, does have that influence; it just stays somewhere out there at the back of one’s head weathering a storm filled with self-concern, self-doubt, and anxiety. You keep asking yourself if you are doing enough, keep wondering why people around you are not talking to you, and keep worrying when the hell your personal issues will be next for discussion.

Department meetings would always bring up terrible anticipatory anxiety. I always thought that I was going to be gossiped about during the meeting, especially after. The air was tense. All the others appeared so collected, so all in place. Inside, I, however, bore all the secrets of my private life, struggling to hide the weakness. In addition to

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academic challenges, there were the mental tolls that came with having to wear the mask of perfection that began unduly enhancing my happiness.

As time passed, I began to catch a glimpse of burnout syndrome. I could no longer sleep, pay attention to anything, and the feeling that I was constantly scrutinized — appraised and criticized — was overwhelming. My understanding of self and how I related to myself began to plummet. Was I a teacher, fellow staff, or someone's friend? Or was I merely the 'in-tight white bag' of a good academic image that I was struggling to keep?

Ending The Current Culture: It's About Time

Change is indeed required in this case. Learning, development and academic interest are the foundations of the institution which is ideal. However, rampant idle talk and unhealthy competition stifles imagination making it unwelcoming. It is about time we stop considering each other as robots who need to be perfect. Redefining the word success in the working environment: For all of us have personal lives, our battles, our flaws, and these should be accepted, without persecution, understanding the situation.

The changes and transformation is not going to be a walk in the park but it can start with baby steps. It starts with us—faculty, staff, and even the administration—being responsible for how we treat each other. It starts with the need of being safe

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without the told of someone talking behind the back appreciating the needs to be weak sometimes. It starts with the need to change the impression of what success should be to fit within the parameters and language of institutions.

As long as gossip and the need to be perfect in academia are not squarely dealt with, silence will engulf many of us. The time has come to liberate ourselves from judgmental attitudes and gossip and one wants to daresay reconstruct 'academic' space as one that appreciates people for who they are and not the glossy image projected of them.

The study of Michelson and Mouly (2004) discussed workplace negative gossip, much like other forms of workplace aggression, can significantly damage an employee's dignity and reputation, leading to a distorted form of job stress. This often results in negative job outcomes, such as unexplained absences, taking unnecessary leave, or disengaging from work duties. Over time, this can lead to a decline in job satisfaction, reduced motivation, lower work efficiency, and in some cases, resignation from the job.

Reflective Questions for the readers:

1. How does the gossip culture in academia contribute to a toxic work environment, and what impact does it have on faculty well-being?

2. How can faculty members foster a more supportive and collegial atmosphere that combats the negative effects of gossip and perfectionism?

Chapter 10

Problems and Issues in Academia: A Summary Discussion

The Pressure to Publish is one of the most prevalent and frequently analyzed factors in the academia. Many educationists view producing a body of work and publications as a prerequisite for earning tenure, promotion, and securing the needed funds. As a result, the audience is less attended to and teaching, and other fulfilling aspects of academic engagement are compromised due to the workaholic tendencies. This situation is made even worse in research-oriented universities where there are large volumes of teaching assignments and high expectations for publications. This may cause work-related stress, along with an unhealthy obsession with publishing for the sake of it, which compromises academic standards and destroys the value of scholarship.

Associated with it is the Administrative Load and Bureaucracy that is symbolic to every professional educator. The majority of the faculties are usually too much engaged on non-teaching responsibilities for instance, attending a lot of meetings, filling different types of forms, or even managing the policies and finances of their department. These other duties distract them from their most important tasks as

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teachers and researchers leading to tension and exhaustion. Also, as the rules governing academics are tedious and dynamic, this makes it hard for the staffs to cope with creating anger and powerlessness to the majority who are in a system where the administrators are busy with pointless activities instead of teaching and intellectual work.

These structural pressures further add to the existing Mental Health Issues and Stress in Academia. Faculty members, especially those on tenure-track positions, tend to experience anxiety, depression, and a sense of burnout. The situation is exacerbated by a clear case of high expectations that go without appropriate compensation, any assurance of the job being permanent and consequently many avoidable mental health issues. Such has been the trend in the past few years during which several hospitals have been either established or restructured to support health care delivery within the university yet still the faculty members are left to carry these emotional and psychological burdens almost entirely alone. For some of them, this leads to being unable to balance the pressure to perform and run a family, which is why so many people leave this occupation and never come back.

Another dimension is the Absolute Absence of Any Legal Protections that the teachers have, particularly in cases where they are wrongfully fired or when their academic freedom has been compromised. There are situations, however, when due

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to the nature of the job, several academic personnel do not enjoy legal cover as other workers, which opens them up to possible harassment and intimidation by management or workmates. Such circumstances may also breed over compliance as academic staff may feel that there is no room for dissent without risks of unemployment. The lack of such protection however, equally renders faculty members defenceless against workplace harassment and ill-treatment whenever it occurs.

Toxic Leadership in Academia is numerous. Too often, however, this structure is supported only to the level of the deans, the department chairs, and the administrators in instances where their leadership fails to promote an inclusive, supportive, or transparent structure. Toxic leadership can take on several forms such as excessive control, absence of communication, selective treatment, and diminishing control over the faculty members. This type of leadership creates a negative influence in the institution, as well affects the mental well-being of the people and creates fear in the working environment. They often feel cut off and even emotionally overwhelmed, especially if the top openly dysfunctional leadership does not deal with the structural problems within the units.

The Padrino System or again, and arguably more problematically, nepotism, is another burning issue in academia where people's relations and favouritism supersedes merit-granted opportunities.

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Challenges are also prevalent within such institutions that make tenure and employment decision based on associations and not qualification, which mostly promote a vice of monotony, obscurity and injustice. Hence, erodes its principles claiming to be based on objective criteria of evaluation, replacing potential and qualified academic staff with those who have contacts. It encourages paying lip service to the more enlightened principles of meritocracy in academia.

A trending Situation is Faculty Teaching Beyond Their Expertise which is quite disturbing. Mostly to cut cost or more so to repond to student subscribing demand, a good number of the institutions appoints the faculty members to teach courses not related to the areas specialized in. This escalates the tension on the faculty members whose professional backgroud or training does not prepare the individuals to teach in such courses. It shows the lack of a commitment worth pursuing in sustaining academic excellence and the professional growth of the faculty, and in the end adversely affect both the faculty and the students.

Moreover, College Students with Suicidal Thoughts have become too prominent an aspect of academia that it sounds disturbing. The mental health of students in recent years has grown to a crisis level, and most faculty members play the role of aiding them, with very little or no training, or even facilities, to deal with the heavy concern at hand. Many teachers are left in a position where they feel they cannot

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support their students effectively even when such support is required, which ultimately increases the stress levels as well as the emotional burden on the faculty.

Last but not least, it is the Toxic Gossip culture within the academy that further promotes the unhealthy obsession with achievement, and the overwhelming stress experienced by individuals within that environment. Most of the time, organizations engaged in academic work tend to be very competitive and critical, putting 'off record' aspects of people's lives as well as their achievements. As a result, this culture of gossip creates distrust and hostility between members which elevates tension and encourages withdrawal from other members. There is also the problem of perfectionism where the academic staff feel that there are standards set that they should meet, which can be quite distressing.

All these factors, in the end, speak volumes of the profound and engrained challenges that afflict educational institutions which abandon the academic staff and students' well-being in favor of bureaucracy, efficiency, and authority. To resolve these issues, it is critical to make organizational changes, increase mental health assistance, and work towards creating a more equitable and nurturing academic culture.

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