



Nepotism Practices in the United States and Saudi Arabia: A Review of Literature

Wala Almostadi

Assistant Professor, King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This paper reviewed the studies that have explored Nepotism in the United States and Saudi Arabia. Nepotism is an issue that raises controversy because it is associated to both positive and negative characteristics. Different countries and cultures have different views of nepotism. The article presents causes and consequences of nepotism, theoretical background and definition of the term, and a brief story of modern nepotism, from the medieval times to the twentieth century in Europe and the United States. This paper also presents a comparison of nepotistic practices in the United States and Saudi Arabia and critical views against and in favor of nepotism as social practice.

Keywords: *Nepotism; Wasta; favoritism*

Introduction

Nepotism is a cultural concept that has permeated all societies in history. According to Dewald (2004), nepotism happens when somebody shows favoritism to family members or friends by granting them with access to jobs, titles, or positions. Nepotistic practices existed since ancient civilizations (e.g., Egypt, Greece, and Rome). Nepotism sustains the idea that families have a moral obligation of protecting their own kind. Bellow (2003) argued that nepotism has deep roots in nature, biology, and society. For example, maternal altruism is a phenomenon that exists in many cultures. Similarly, within nature, female primates show similar protective behaviors. Darwin defined the basis for sociability in the manifestation of sympathy, observed as well among primates.

The root of the word nepotism comes from the Latin *Nepos*, which means grandson or nephew (Ciulla, 2005). Other scholars (Bellow, 2003) argued that nepotism comes from the Italian word *nepotismo*, used during medieval times to describe corruptive practices of popes, who would appoint illegitimate children and relatives to official positions. However, most scholars agreed that nepotism is a cultural practice, ingrained in the development of family bonds, especially in cultures in which taking care of the relatives is a moral obligation.

The Webster Online Dictionary (2013) defined nepotism as “Undue attachment to relations; favoritism shown to members of one's family; bestowal of patronage in consideration of relationship, rather than of merit or of legal claim.” Nepotism had presence in different moments of human history and has raised debates about its possible virtues and negative consequences. Nepotism is a word that many people perceive with negative connotations, especially in countries like the United States (Mulder, 2008).

Nepotism: The Old and the New

Ciulla (2005) summarized the differences of what is considered ancient and modern nepotism. Ancient nepotism refers directly to the existence of this practice among ancient cultures, such as old China, Hebrews, Romans, and Greek. All of these cultural categories embraced nepotism as part of the common life. A Chinese proverb says, "When a man becomes an official, his wife, children, dogs, cats, and even chicken fly up to heaven" (Bellow, 2003, p. 95). In the old China, polygamy was accepted, for which intense intra-familial demands existed, including the obligation of protecting the members of the family. The Hebrew, on the other hand, left a legacy of biblical stories about the rivalry between family members for power positions under conditions of nepotism. Finally, the Roman and Greek both praised the obligation than a man would have over his family, including ensuring the welfare of younger generations.

The modern nepotism, on the other hand, refers to the use of nepotism practices in modern Europe and the new world. In modern Europe, nepotism emerged from the power of church, arranged marriages, and paternalistic commerce. In the new world, the first signs of nepotism emerged from the political spheres since the founding father and until today. It is not rare that relatives of individuals occupying influential political positions end in influential political or governmental positions as well.

A Contemporary Perspective

Reed (1998) summarized the results from a nepotism survey in the United States' public service sector in the middle 1980s. The focus of this study was to evaluate how couples in positions of power benefited each other by taking advantage of the other partner's privileges. The study showed that most private companies by the 1980s already prohibited nepotism practices, or having family members working for the same or similar divisions. According to Reed, this trend began in the 1970s as result of federal regulations prohibiting spouses or relatives to work together. This new policy affected directly hiring practices in the public sector. Curiously, this movement was openly defeated by the National Association of University Professors and from the US Department of Health Education and Civil Rights. These anti-nepotism practices applied to a great amount of couples sharing responsibilities as college professors. Reed (1998) reported numerous cases of dual-career couples, especially with middle age professional couples in isolated places, where job opportunities were scarce.

According to Reed (1998), academic professional couples appealed to professional organizations to advocate their right to remain employed teaching in the same institution, as long as both members were highly qualified for the position. Reed (1998) alerted that the opponents of anti-nepotism practices argued that working couples are part of a new generation of workers seeking for a better balance between their professional careers and their personal lives. The solution, according to these sectors, is not to prohibit couples working together, but to educate managers to handle better these situations. Despite these arguments, the amount of couples sharing professorships diminished considerably during this time.

Today, nepotism carries a negative connotation of favoritism (Ford & McLaughlin, 1986; Laker & Williams, 2003). For example, employing friends or relatives in the workplace is seen as a symptom of injustice. Nepotism is also a topic of biased discussion when such nepotism is between couple or significant ones in the workplace. When a couple works together in the same place, people make immediate assumptions about undeserved rewards (Laker & Williams, 2003). A series of lawsuits against big corporations in the 1980s alerted the government of the United States about the contemporary role that nepotism occupy within companies, reinforcing the need for anti-nepotism laws (Reed, 1988). A survey in 1986 reported that 43% of surveyed companies had anti-nepotism policies in practice and 17% had informal policies in place (Ford & McLaughlin, 1986).

Nevertheless, Bellow (2003) placed the fight against nepotism practices in North America during the movement of civil rights because the Civil Rights Act dismantled ethnic and racial monopolies related to nepotistic practices. By removing barriers toward equal opportunity in the workplace, family business owners would have to consider (maybe for the first time) qualified outsiders to internal positions, based mainly on job performance (Phillip, 2012). However, nepotism in family business is a practice that continues until today. Such is the case of politics. The United States political history presents with several "political dynasties." The most famous of these is the "Kennedy clan."

Historical Background

The family nucleus is a strong bond that comes with shared feelings of compassion, gratitude, and even guilt. Matt Ridley (as in Bellow, 20004) argued that nepotism is the basis of the family. For Ridley, the inquiry was how humans transferred this capacity of nepotism to non-relatives and what social bonds would equal families and friends. Nepotism is ingrained within the history of civilizations, especially within societal sectors with strong bonds to clan structures. Modern history also continued a tradition of nepotism, most evident in the concept of family businesses (Bellow, 2003).

Modern History of Nepotism

During the Renaissance, nepotistic practices spread across Europe, and those whom did not place their relatives in positions of privilege, were considered outcasts by members of society. This would apply to money, possessions, and nobility titles. In terms of commercial activity, business owners have always tended to hire their own relatives for many years. Ecclesiastic organizations were fundamental in the proliferation of nepotistic practices. It is historically known that Catholic popes used to appoint their nephews as cardinals and bishops. One practice of the era was to grant “Papal States” or land to these relatives. The church would also offer support in the military, political, and economic issues, including participating in battles against family enemies. Dewald (2004) emphasized the case of Pope Sixtus IV, who implemented nepotistic practices extensively from 1471 to 1484, appointing six relatives to the position of cardinal. Most of these relatives exhibited immoral behaviors; however, they stayed in their positions. These practices diminished when a financial crisis in the early 1600s forced the church to limit the power of the Pope, as result of reforms decided during the Council of Trent.

However, Bellow (2003) considered as the golden age of European nepotism the period between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, during the era of feudalism. Notorious families for practicing nepotistic practices in Europe were the Borgias, the Bonapartes, and the Rothschilds. European families considered the “entrepreneurs” of the sixteenth and seventeenth century took advantage of the many opportunities society presented to develop dynastic ambition. Therefore, nepotism proliferated among those with more power and resources. From the three families in lead the early stages of modern nepotism; the more powerful example of nepotistic practices was the Borgias dynasty.

The Borgias, emerged from the church when this institution was not strongly centralized power and the pope served as a figure of political influence, mediator of public conflict at all societal spheres. According to Grendler (2004), the also called “House of Borgia” initiated with Alfonso de Borja, Spanish religious scholar who became bishop and cardinal, and made relationship with members of the Spanish royalty. Most notorious in his ecclesiastic career was Alfonso’s nephew Rodrigo Borgia, later Pope Alexander VI. Rodrigo was also a Spanish noble who established his residency in Italy in the 1400s and used his social influence to reach the papacy. This dynasty produced two popes, 11 cardinals, one saint, and numerous princes and dukes. Rodrigo held the power of the church for 35 years, accumulating considerable wealth and influence.

While the Borgias placed their attention in the Catholic church, the Rothschilds were the equivalent in the Jewish society (Wasserman, Schwarzfuchs, & Lipman, 2007). This was a family of notorious for its role in the Jewish community and contributed with their power to the settlement of that State of Israel. In France, the Bonapartes emerged from the power of Napoleon I of France, a military leader contributed of the French Revolution and helped transform France to the status of empire. Through his military victories, he established a reputation for himself and this helped his family to proliferate as owners of lands in all the territories of France, accumulating also wealth and influence.

Nepotism in North America

In North America, the first signs of nepotism emerged during the settlement of the 13 colonies. The first people of influence in the colonies were the members of the clergy, in this case from the movement of Puritanism (Bellow, 2003). Puritan leaders rise as elites that became the center of religious and economic society within the New World’s settlements. They believed in their responsibility of providing for their families and became responsible for numerous activities, including political organization and social order. It was not rare that members of these families were in charge of deciding disputes and cases of lawbreakers. Some of these elites developed up to four generations of influential men and were fundamental in later campaigns against urban vices and counterproductive social behaviors (e.g., gambling, drinking), especially those associated with clergy (Boyer, 1978).

Emigration from different parts of Europe to the New World began soon after the news of recently discovery land and potential wealth arrive to the Old World. Among those immigrants, a category of “first class” European families settled in North America, especially in Virginia (Bellow, 2003). One example of the profile of these families was the Lees. Coronel Richard Lee, from the Saxton line, came to America in 1640 and by the 1660s, the Lees possessed seven plantations and hundreds of slaves. It was also a nepotistic practice to pair members from these families with members of other families with power. That is how the House of Lee met the House of the Constables and continued a tradition of nepotism with the production of two signers of the Declaration of Independence, four governors, four confederate generals, nine members of Congress, a Union admiral, numerous diplomats, and one president. These families use the concept of honor as argument to choose people from within their family for positions of power in politics, society, and militia.

By that time, the first generations of families, product of the new American land, emerged. Historical figures like Benjamin Franklin emerged and with them, a new generation of native families of the land began a direct competition with the old English families. Bellow (2003) narrated how a war on nepotism began in America during the 1700s with the phenomenon called “the 50 families.” The 50 families were a conglomerate of families along the colonies with ample power over local authority, politics, local governmental offices, and clergy. A transition between those families that came from Europe and the families that rise in the new world initiated as the

opportunities of the new land allowed native habitants to reach wealth and fortune. These families were fundamental in the War of Independence and the dissolution of America's nexus from Great Britain.

Bellow (2003) narrated that nepotism never ceased in this stage of the story of North America, it simply switched to new dynasties. The founding fathers, for example, were as well husbands and family men who were held responsible for the welfare of many family members. Although the founding fathers believed in the contention of ambition, rather than an open display of this characteristic, the founding fathers left a legacy of "professional politicians" that continued to rule America during the turbulent first years of the union. Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, and Adams were the most notable founding fathers who perpetuated nepotistic practices with multiple nephews, sons, and siblings placed in positions of power in militia, economics, and politics.

The relationship of the predominant families in the colonial America was one of goodwill, in which helping acquaintances and a relative was something expected (Bellow, 2003). The Washington family, for example, arrived to the today state of Virginia and established quickly as farmers. George Washington grew up within the many farms of his brothers and sisters. In fact, George Washington obtained his first political rank after his surrogate father died and he took his position as adjutant of the colony, despite his lack of military experience.

Bellow (2003) reported that Washington is known in history for his elevated self-esteem. During his years as leader of the new nation, the protected particular interests for protégées, stepsons, and daughters. His favoritism to one son over the others provoked a split on his cabinet and gave rise to the first political party of opposition in the story of the incipient United States. Writings from Washington denoted his open belief about his obligation in helping those near his family. Alexander Hamilton, also known as the American Bonaparte, was the most notorious of Washington's protégés because of his role in the establishment of the United States Constitution.

The Jefferson family followed the political steps of the Washington family. Jefferson emerged quickly during the colonial era as a strong leader and man of contradictions (Bellow, 2003). He married well and belonged to the elite of families in connection with the emergent government. His brothers and uncles occupied important positions in government and society. For a while, he lived comfortably as the American Ambassador in France and from their continued mentoring of political careers of her sons-in-law and sons of near friends. While his service in the government, Jefferson employed many of his relatives and friends to be part of his cabinet.

The Adams Family was another political dynasty of the United States. The Adams family is linked to the founder father John Adams. Adams believed that the distinguished families were distinct from each other, although himself he was a self-made man (Bellow, 2003). According to historians, Adams exhibited strong leadership watched over the future of his sons. According to Bellow, a historical character in the Adams Family was Abigail Adams, the wife of Adam's son and sixth president of the United States, (e.g., Quincy Adams). Bellow described Abigail Adams as a fundamental personality in supporting the political aspiration of the Adams family and for practicing openly nepotism as a matter of family morals. Boyer (1978) emphasized the role of women in the organization of the colonial society by advocating with enthusiasm for important moral reforms. The Adams family produced two presidents of the United States, the patriarch John Adams, who presided from 1797 to 1801, and John Quincy Adams, who presided from 1825 to 1829.

The 19th Century in America

The 19th Century in America was a century of significance for nepotism in the new world. In America, different societal sectors had diverse political and economic reasons for asking the independence, including new possibilities for trade and financial welfare (Bellow, 2003). It was an era of flourishing family businesses and with these the settlement of nepotism as a way to ensure the survival of these emporiums. These farmers transitioned successfully to an industrialized America. They sent their sons and relatives to universities like Harvard and Yale and produced a generation of influential professionals in all aspects of the North American elites. Boyer (1978) emphasized that the level of organization of these business elites shifted political powers and influenced the traditional ways of American life. The existence of public-private partnerships allowed the growth of cities and promoted initiatives to accomplish social goals in America (Monti, 2013).

Bellow (2003) emphasized the role of these families during the American Civil War. Whole families in the North and South of the United States were fighting for what they believed would be the best economical and societal structures to sustain the nation in the next years. Bellow stated that the differences between south and north were so deep that many believed the south of the United States would become a nation itself. The Civil War became a mirror of nepotistic practices and passions about bloodlines. Some families lose power because their differences of opinions divided the loyalties and resources between two different causes. According to Boyer (1978), the first influential families in America lived in rural areas, farms, and small towns. However, some were influential in the post-Civil War urbanization of the major coastal areas, including Baltimore, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.

The Progressive Era of Nepotism

Brookhiser (1999) reported that the history of North American politics is full of nepotistic practices. Brookhiser challenged the precept of "all men are created equal" in relation to American politics because of the

existence of political dynasties in the United States, such as the Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Bush families. This author emphasized that North America is not different from the antiquated concepts of royalty and favoritism that the new world countries fought during the independence wars. The author also stated that these families often act as if their members would carry a “political gene” that makes them different from regular men.

The amount of opportunities that members of these families possess do not compare with the opportunities that other talented man could have to occupy key positions in cabinet and government (Brookhiser, 1999). However, prominent social families during the advent of the twentieth Century contributed to the urban renewal of cities. For example, Flint (2009) wrote a book about the contributions of the families Moses and Jacobs in the planning efforts in New York city during the 1950 and 1960s. While Moses worked to expand the Fifth Avenue, Jacobs was a revolutionary woman and urban planner worried for the industrialization of inner-city neighborhoods. The author emphasized the role of these families in the expansion of the city and the improvement of mass transit as opposed to the establishment of more highways.

Bellow (2003), on the other hand, described how the Roosevelt family also constituted a case of nepotistic drive hidden under the false premise of the “self-made man.” Bellow stated that the Roosevelt family presented itself as a story of triumph and persistence, but it had embedded nepotistic practices that were internalized and not recognized. A New York Times newspaper article of 1936 denounced that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt practiced nepotistic practices a great scale, naming an outstanding amount of White House employees without the proper qualifications. The article reported that nepotistic practices were proliferated in the government of Roosevelt at many levels and members of the cabinet would have wives, siblings, and children working for them, with many documented cases. The Roosevelt dynasty produced two presidents of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, who presided from 1901 to 1909 and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who presided from 1933 to 1945.

The Roosevelt family was only one of the United States political dynasties. Brookhiser (1999) denounced that the Kenney family’s power proliferated through several generations and states of the United States (e.g., Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island). Most people related to the Kennedy family, by blood or association, finish-receiving opportunities to occupy office positions. A newspaper article in the 1962 (Reston, 1962), denounced how the Kennedys used their influence to ensure the patronage of family members within the Kennedy Clan. Calling this behavior “distasteful,” the newspaper denounced that John F. Kennedy used his influence to impulse the careers of his brother Robert as United States Attorney General, his brother in-law, Sargent Shriver, as leader of the Peace Corps, and his other brother Ted Kennedy as senator. The newspaper mentioned that the members of the Kennedy family were as talented as other people for these positions but the influence of the president helped them to advance their careers with evident political advantage.

It was during the progressive era that social reformers attempted presenting favoritism and nepotism, especially when these practices related to organized crime in the United States. The 1920s and 1930s era in the United States was characterized by the proliferation bribery and favoritism. According to Lyman and Potter (2007), prohibition promoted one of the most corrupted eras among different governmental levels in the United States. Scholars called this age the era of the “big bosses,” because of the influence that these individuals exercised over society. Their interest in controlling the political machine of the 1930s motivated these sectors to bribe government officials to have their protégés in positions of power. Lewis and Gilman (2005) reported that any preferential treatment (for personal gain or to help others outside the scope of collective welfare), is unacceptable from the perspective of ethical politics.

Nepotism, however, helped several notorious families to expand their wealth and resources during the decades of 1930 to 1950. Laird (as in “The Encyclopedia of Management,” 2008) emphasized that personal networks among high-class families contribute to career success, similarly to the influence of the mafia. Families such as the Carnegies and the Rockefellers are some of the influential families that built their fortunes during this era (Robinson & Ritchie, 2010). Robinson and Ritchie emphasized that the contributions that these prominent families left to society in the form of legacies, philanthropic contributions, and charity foundations forced society to ignore their clear symptoms of nepotism. Moreover, the government supported openly these families, granting them money and resources for their enterprises. According to the mentioned authors, these families positioned themselves in privileged positions, from which they could influence indirectly public policy to obtain grants and financial subsidies.

The Rockefellers and Carnegies belonged to a category of families considered social reformists. The reformism movement promoted by families in influential positions also acted as a “social engineering” of the middle class culture or urban populations (Monti, 2013). For example, the urbanization of suburbs and proliferation of middle class college students are initiatives supported many times by families in influential positions. This reformism was also called “new urbanism” and was often fueled by people in privileged positions who believe in social advancement (Monti, 2013). On the other hand, authors reported that the development of urban places without providing to the improvement of poorer classes produced a mix of classes that were not always well blended.

Nepotism and Immigrant Enclaves

Nepotism is also evident in the business relationships among enclaves of immigrants in the United States. Yang, Colarelli, Han, and Page (2011) presented nepotism as an adaptive function of ethnic altruism. This aligns with Darwin's theories of how humans and primates have a natural tendency to protect their own (Bellow, 2003). Yang et al. (2011) emphasized the loyalty that Korean immigrants in entrepreneur positions exhibit toward clan members, as one of many examples. The practice of working together enhances the ethnic character of these cohorts. Nepotism is embedded in the hiring practices or immigrant enclaves. Immigration scholar John Higham (as in Briggs, 1995), reported that family unifications not only reinforce behaviors but also perpetuate existing patterns of immigration, such as pursuing the family clan. Moreover, immigrant enclaves exhibit all the characteristics for the generalization of ethnic behavior.

The decision to continue these practices have foundation on ideas, such as, (a) it is safer to engage in commercial transactions with members of the family, and (b) reciprocity of relationships maintain mutual trust among relatives (Yang et al., 2011). Another element that influences the level of practiced nepotism is the amount of resources. Members from immigrant enclaves with capital engage rapidly in start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures, embedding nepotistic practices to hiring practices (Yang et al.). Immigrants from higher social strata and more resources will be able to influence the job market with more readability than low wealth immigrants, who are clearly in disadvantage from their counterparts (Casey, n.d.).

Nepotistic practices among immigrant enclaves extend outside the family business. It is common that managers from minorities with strong tradition on nepotism hire employees from their same ethnic background (Yang et al., 2011). Therefore, Yang proposed that more research would be necessary to understand kin nepotism and its social consequences. For example, although nepotism plays a significant role in the immigration patterns, the United States Census Data does not provide data to measure the influence of nepotism over immigration, vs., for example, marriage (Briggs, 1995). Briggs (1996) ensured that nepotism accounted for 80% of all legal admissions to the United States in the middle 1990s, as opposed to skills, education, mastery of English, or settlement patterns.

Nepotism in America Today (Business, Politics, and Entertainment)

Wong and Kleiner (1994) reported that nepotism in America today is embedded the most to business practices. Although business nepotism is considered unprofessional, the proliferation of entrepreneurs and family businesses still facilitate the use of nepotism as hiring practice. The problem with nepotism is when people in positions of power hire relatives or friends who do not have the best qualifications to occupy a business role. According to these authors, a single family or successive family generations in the 1980s controlled 35% of the 500 fortune companies in the United States. Individuals with potential and talent become demoralized when these companies name people from their families to occupy high positions, disregarding the possibility of them to have a better future under that company. Some companies have sacrificed their possibilities of managerial efficiency in lieu of nepotism.

A study among Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology students reported that students from parents with family businesses would occupy positions in those companies at their graduation (Wong & Kleiner, 1994). Moreover, some universities operate under the assumptions of "legacy preferences" (Wendover, 2004). According to this source, family legacies in Ivy League institutions in the United States constituted 10% to 15%. Some prestigious institutions, like Notre Dame, reported a 23%. Member of distinguished families have two to four times more opportunities to be accepted to these universities. However, in terms of employment after graduation, experts agree that the children of people with businesses would benefit from seeking employment outside their family business' scope, as this will allow them to develop their own sense of identity and professional expertise. In addition, it will gain the admiration of family business employees, who generally do not sympathize with the beneficiaries of nepotism.

In the business scenario, nepotism has sustained relevance because of the assumption that family members with more resources have the moral obligation of taking care of their own (Mulder, 2008). Ford and McLaughlin (1986) reported that nepotism possesses a negative connotation in North America, especially when spouses hire each other under one organization. Nepotism is considered by many a practice of favoritism, although contemporary scholars consider this phenomenon as neither good nor bad. The proliferation of family businesses in the United States exacerbates the realities of nepotism. Wendover (2004) reported the Small Business Administration in the United States estimated 13 million family business employing couples, relatives, friends, and siblings in 2003. Nepotism is a common practice in American businesses.

Most recently in the history of the United States, the Bush dynasty is an example of one of the last political dynasties. The Bush family, with power and influence, was accused of nepotistic practices when President George W. Bush allowed his brother Jeb to drill the costs of Florida in the 2000s despite the scientific warnings about ecological risks (Gilan, 2001). Experts stated that President Bush was influenced by his family ties when he approved this decision. The President's concession was interpreted as a clear signal of favoritism and blind faith in the family businesses, especially when the Kyoto protocol was requiring nations around the world to control the amount of gas emissions. The Bush dynasty produced two presidents of the United States, George H. W. Bush, who presided from 1989 to 1993 and his son George W. Bush, who presided from 2001 to 2009.

Nepotistic practices also have shaped the entertainment industry in North America. Kramer (1998) reported that the American entertainment industry also shows a long history of nepotism, as it seen on families, such as Redgrave, Spelling, Marshall, Barrymore, and Coppola. These families have remained influential in the entertainment industry, supporting generations of producers, directors, actors, and filmmakers. Kramer argued that the movie and television industry has always promoted family connections. One of the most recent examples is the Spelling family, which made of young actress Tori Spelling a television and reality star until today, despite the thousands of other talented young actresses apt for the job. Tori Spelling's case became a classic case study on family nepotism parodied in television's comedy sketches (Kramer, 1998).

Kramer (1998) emphasized that nepotism is more evident when the beneficiaries of such favors do not have enough talent to accomplish the expectations of such role. Other families, such as the Marshall's, engaged several generations of family members working for a same television show; however, the acceptance of the public helped them to build a dynasty of television and movie producers, writers, and filmmakers. Other example of successful nepotism is the spousal union of Mary Taylor Moore and husband Grant Tinker. Although Tinker did not consider himself as nepotistic, family members up to a third generation ran his studio.

Most recently in the history of the United States, nepotistic practices have expanded to government sectors, with interpersonal dynamics of insider trading and hiring people by special interest. For example, the phenomenon known as "The Revolving Door" presents cases in which former legislators and government officials go to work in the companies that they once regulated and vice versa, creating a cycle of hiring and re-hiring the same people to pursue a specific agenda. Kirschten (2001) reported the existence of nepotistic relationships, in which people in influential positions benefit and even progress their professional careers. This seems to be common case in the high spheres of government. Scholars argued that an ethical fundamental is overlooked when these individuals pass from legislation to private industry, especially in issues of internal or sensitive information.

Kirschten (2001) announced numerous cases in Washington DC about government lawyers or official who convert to lobbyists or government officers who convert to corporate executives. Shifting between the private and public sectors, notwithstanding, is possible for those within circles of influence, members of dynasties, or people with inside information. For example, biotechnology, a sector of intensive regulation and economic growth during the 2000s reflected these realities when numerous United States officials involved in committees regulating biotechnological products moved from their governmental positions to high-paid jobs in the private sector of biotech ("The Internationalist," 2002). Although government's officers have tried to alarm about the ethical implications of this this type of nepotistic relations in Washington, DC, scholars reported that these practices are embedded in the government culture and will be difficult to change ("The New York Times," 1989).

Anti-Nepotism Practices in the United States

Brookhiser (1999) reported that most anti-nepotism work guidelines in the United States emerged in the 1950s with the objective of employing incompetent employees in lieu of nepotism. The rules of anti-nepotism have been applied largely to the cases of spouses on the job. These guidelines acquired bigger relevance during the 1960s and 1970s as larger amounts of women joined the workforce. Organizations can choose the level of rigor in applying anti-nepotistic practices. Some companies banned absolutely the employment of spouses or relatives whereas others allow this practice as long as they are not under the direct supervision of each other. The presumption of supervision in nepotism is that this could influence decisions when of granting promotions or salary increases. However, such in the case of nepotism among immigrants, nepotism could increase group cohesiveness and mutual trust (Yang et al., 2011).

During the 1980s, anti-nepotism practices were subject of controversy among Human Resources professionals in the United States (Ford & McLaughlin, 1986). However, the interest in studying anti-nepotistic practices has reduced through the years. For example, a survey from the American Society for Personnel Administration found in the 1980s that 43% of the surveyed companies enforce strict anti-nepotism policies (Reed, 1986), whereas that only a 9% of companies were concerned about anti-nepotistic practices in the 1990s (Bruce & Reed, 1993). The Society for Human Resource Management reported in 1990 that 80% of the more than 400 companies surveyed allowed couples and blood relatives working together.

Nevertheless, companies continue to regulate nepotistic practices although at different levels of rigor. Wexler (1982) reported at least 10 levels of nepotism within organizations, ranging from highly strict to highly flexible. However, the most disseminated anti-nepotism practice implemented in the United States is the prohibition to supervise directly relatives and spouses. Mulder (2008) reported that spouses, especially women, are the most affected when nepotistic practices are denounced because companies usually remove people with lower hierarchy and seniority from their positions. Because women entered the workforce massively later in the history, they usually occupy lower hierarchical positions. Several court litigations in the 1970s, such as *Yuhas v. Libbey-Owens-Ford Co. and Harper v. Trans World Airlines, Inc.*, tried to prove the imbalance between women and men on the job about nepotistic practices with moderated effect.

Mulder (2008), stated that other legal cases in the 1980s (e.g., *Thompson v. Board of Trustees*, 1981) opened the doors for accepting the employment of couples under one organization. These cases based their judicial

decisions in the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, which establishes the right to marry and the rights of people with marital status. These legal precedents facilitated the proliferation of nepotistic practices in the United States, especially after societal sectors accepted the realities of the dual-career home as part of the industrialized lifestyles.

A recent controversy in the issue of nepotism is the enforcement of the Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action encompasses a series of procedures and policies to ensure that companies do not incur in discriminatory practices against minorities, such as ethnic categories or women (Kravitz et al., 1997). Companies interested in attracting individuals from minorities are beginning to implement anti-nepotism policies to improve their public images and community relations. However, Mulder (2008) emphasized that no empirical evidence exists about the effectiveness of these practices in terms of human resources outcomes by adapting company policies to the Affirmative Action guidelines. Harris, Lievens, and Van Hove (2006) reported that an unfair decision does not mean necessarily that discrimination has taken place. Moreover, divided viewpoints exist today in the business scenario regarding the employment based on gender/race versus employment by family nexus (Mulder, 2008).

Nepotism in Saudi Arabia

Networks and relationships are important elements of the Saudi Arab society. Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) emphasized that although mentoring and development of relationships are described in numerous studies, a lack of studies role of these relationships within the Saudi Arabia workforce exist. Nevertheless, personal networks and family relationships are fundamental to the Arab social context. "Wasta" is the term Arabs use to describe the social connections and networks that are the foundation of their nepotistic practices. Tlaiss and Kauser reported that only a small amount of studies considers Wasta as research subject, for which it is imperative raising awareness among Middle East organizations to fill this gap in the existing scholar literature.

However, contemporary Arab organizations are becoming aware of the role that social connections have in building *corporate competence* (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). The effects of Wasta are embedded in the cultural behaviors of Middle East but are not clearly defined for some business sectors. This becomes more evident when managers from other countries relocate to Saudi Arabia to make business. Those able to understand the nature of Wasta and social approach to nepotistic practices can succeed. The cultural clash between the nepotism viewpoints between North America and Middle East can be impairment for a fruitful relationship between these two different sides of the nepotistic spectrum. Managers will have to shape their strategic interventions based on the cultural implication of Wasta, which plays an important role in the Arab economy, government, and society (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

Wasta encompasses a series of family networks that shape the decision-making process in numerous Arab regions (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). It influences the career advancement of some individuals who are nearer these connections and networks. When an outsider decides to make business in Saudi Arabia, the understanding of Wasta is important to managing professional and personal relationships. Hutchins and Weir (2006) defined Wasta as the process of using family connections to advance a career. Wasta encompasses relationships with influential people and it is seen as a normal custom of this society. Wasta is a concept embraced by the majority and those outside of these networks suffer alienation and lack of career support. El Said (2013) clarified that Wasta is practiced widely throughout the Arab world, and that those who practice Wasta increase their social status and influence. Those who ask for money to promote Wasta practices are considered bribers and their behavior is considered shameful.

A study on the nature of Wasta (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011) reflected that 89% of the professionals in Saudi Arabia perceived significant value on the benefits of family networks over their career advancement. On the other hand, 59% of the respondents declared that they would like to see reduced the use of Wasta and 80% considered it unfair because of the different treat that people receive outside the Wasta. Another limitation in the study of nepotism (e.g., Wasta) in Saudi Arabia is the exclusion of women from research because of gender biases.

Sidani and Thornberry (2003) suggested that, although nepotistic practices in the Arab world can be counterproductive, these are too ingrained in the culture. As result, these will exclude the social spectrum of meritocracy or achievement based on personal achievements and not personal relationships. These authors argued that nepotism in the Arab region is disseminated to the extent that it is socially justifiable although not always work in favor of most people. The historic settlement of family businesses as core of the Arab economy has influenced the establishment of nepotism as a norm. The institutional entrepreneur phenomenon has transformed the organizational practices in the Middle East, altering their ethical perspectives but nurturing family relationships as core for business practice. The result is a hybrid structure in which families seek to produce profit while sometimes hiring unprepared family members to perform the necessary tasks. In other cases, family members could be exploited.

Sidani and Thornberry (2003) emphasized that more study about nepotistic practices in the Arab world is needed to understand how to diminish the negative effect that nepotistic practices could have within these contextual dynamics. Sidani and Thornberry compared the concept of Wasta to the concept of Guanxi in China and Blat in Russia, which are similar practices with relationship to the favoritism toward family members and social

networks. Another aspect in the study of nepotism is that the existing research tries to explain the causes and consequences but does not offer an alternative model to substitute the practice of nepotism.

Critical Views of Nepotism

Different countries have different views of nepotism. People in Italy, Eastern Europe, China, Taiwan, Mexico, and the former Soviet Bloc have shown behaviors consistent with nepotistic practices (Sidani & Thornberry, 2003). The Encyclopedia of Management (2009) reported that the laws in the United States do not prohibit directly hiring family members. However, 10% to 40% of the main North American companies have in place some type of anti-nepotism practices. Nepotism is often associated with negativity and injustice; especially when people without the best skills to represent a company are hired. However, Sidani and Thornberry (2003) argued that nepotism is not necessarily a bad practice.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Nepotism

According to Ellen (2000), advantages of nepotism in family business include the continuity of family legacies, opportunity to teach younger generations a profession or craft, and the opportunity to acquire responsibility and liquidity in a safe environment. Family business, which usually exhibit nepotistic hiring practices, also appeal to different sections of society willing to invest in local enterprises and reject the big corporations. In addition, countries with strong family connections like China, Indonesia, and Japan have achieved outstanding economic growth and wealth despite of having cultures with tendency to nepotism. Nepotism can also promote building of family skills, cohesive environment, better communication, and increased loyalty to the task. Countries with a cultural nepotism embrace the practice and do not place a negative connotation on the concept, contrary to Western countries (e.g., United States). In fact, in some cultures, nepotism is a resource used wisely and legitimized as part of traditional values (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

In addition, Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) emphasized that Westerners have some lessons to learn from nepotism in the Arab world, related especially with mentoring and coaching. Mentoring is beneficial for companies and has been fundamental in the lives of prominent leaders in all fields (e.g., politics, education, business). Mentoring builds deeper relationships between individuals, facilitating knowledge transfer and long-term relationships. Networks not only develop within families, they also extend to the exterior and help connecting individuals, even far away from home.

In the United States, in which the anti-nepotism legal attention has proliferated among spouses, Brookhiser (1999) argued that it is common for two people who work together for extended periods to fall in love and that organizations should not ignore this aspect of the human nature. Good reasons for not discarding spouses to work together include because a company should be able to hire the best candidate, even if he or she is a spouse of somebody who works with the firm. In addition, having couples working together contributes to high retention and issues like mobility are easier with people commuting to the same place.

Opposite sectors to this idea, refute that couples could use time from the office to solve their personal problems instead producing for the firm. Others argue that if a couple forms a coalition in pro their interests this could hurt the interests of the company. Issues related to confidentiality of information and salary disclosure could arise when couples work together. If couples become competitive, they could create additional tension in the workplace. Last, work pace would be affected if both members of a couple want simultaneous vacation time. However, these situations with couples on the job seem to be the exception and not the norm. Flexibility in hiring spouses and relatives can be productive under appropriate supervision. Finally, Yang et al. (2011) emphasized that cohesiveness and mutual trust are clear advantages of nepotism. In addition, benefits of hiring under nepotistic practices reduce the cost associated with organizational markers, such as common language, cultural practices, and artifacts.

On the other hand, nepotism could also represent disadvantages that can hurt the productivity of an organization. Ellen (2000) reported that nepotistic practices poorly implemented could add a dysfunctional character to family businesses. Another challenge emerges when entrepreneurs are not able to leverage the salaries of relatives with external employees, or vice versa.

According to Sidani and Thornberry (2003), scholars would agree in that companies with nepotistic practices can damage their reputation. Nepotism could represent serious disadvantages related to poor business effectiveness, poor performance, and the durability of a family business (Padgett & Morris, 2004). Additional negative consequences of nepotism include low satisfaction, motivation, and retention. For example, good employees with seniority and expertise are often ignored in nepotistic companies, especially family businesses. Mulder (2008) reported that the biggest stigma toward nepotism emerged from favoring people who are incompetent for a job against other qualified applicants. Other scholars argued that nepotism is a way of clans of families to obtain control over the resources of a place or circumstance (Padgett & Morris, 2004). It is believed in some societal sectors that people should obtain reward according to their effort (i.e., meritocracy) and not to their connections (i.e., nepotism). Numerous studies correlating nepotism with weak structures, lack of accountability and motivation, and unfair classification of jobs, positions, and status. Mulder (2008), on the other hand, reported that a bad implemented

nepotism could cost to a company considerable amount in resources like litigation costs, damage of the reputation, and low employee morale.

Conclusion

The root of the work nepotism is associated with corruptive practices and favoritism of family members. Moreover, nepotism is embedded in the cultural behaviors of families from different countries. People from different countries and cultures consistently feel the urge to help those around them as an issue of moral obligation. The debate in favor or against nepotism continues relevant until today while scholars divide nepotism between an ancient and modern nepotism (Ciulla, 2005). Ancient nepotism refers to nepotism during ancient civilizations, such as the Romans, Greek, Hebrew, and Chinese populations. Modern nepotism, on the other hand, refers to the use of nepotism during the history of modern Europe and the new world (e.g., America).

A contemporary perspective of nepotism relates to regulation of practices in the workplace. This view became relevant after the industrialization of society. Moreover, the proliferation of couples working together in America since the 1970s, especially in academia, motivated policy makers to legislate on nepotistic practices (Reed, 1988). During the 1980s, nepotism continued to be associated to polemic discussions after a series of workplace lawsuits. As result, companies in the United States have implemented anti-nepotism policies (Ford & McLaughlin, 1986).

Bellow (2003) published an extensive history of nepotism, giving special attention to nepotism in North America. Below emphasized that nepotism played a significant role in the fight for civil rights in North America because suddenly minorities were competing for the same jobs that would be for the relatives of families in power positions (especially if those families were White). However, nepotism continues today to be one of the main elements of North American political and business scenarios. Examples like the Kennedy clan or the Rockefeller dynasty are examples of how nepotism permeated politics and business through the history of the United States.

Dewald (2004) defined nepotism as favoritism toward family and acquaintances by granting them positions of privilege and responsibility. Nepotism has existed throughout many civilizations. For example, the concept of maternal altruism has permeated numerous cultures until today. The instinct of protectionism manifests even among primates, as observed by Darwin. Nepotism associated with family bonds and guilt when those families are broken (Bellow, 2003). Scholars associate directly the concept of family to nepotistic practice.

Nepotism was a common practice during the evolution of modern Europe. History evidences the role of church in the proliferation of nepotism. Dewald (2004) retold the story of how an era of papal estates placed generations of family members in ecclesiastic positions. It was not until these practices threatened the wealth of church that the roman church decided to stop nepotistic practices through the Trent Council. However, Bellow (2003) considered feudalism to be the golden age of European nepotism. Entrepreneur families in Europe, like the Borgia family, reached considerable and legendary power through nepotism. The Rothschild and the Bonaparte families are other examples of European dynasties.

In North America, nepotism emerged since the colonial era (e.g., 1600s). In the 13 colonies, families near the Puritans, or English people who came to the new world seeking religious freedom, established quickly as clans and influential people among the new colonies. Moreover, they believed that taking care of the family was part of their moral obligations. Eventually, these people became the judges and leaders of the new colonial social order. The 13 colonies saw an influx of this new order, especially in the area of Virginia. The Lee dynasty is an example of the extensive influence of these families by producing numerous founding fathers, military leaders, and politicians.

Later, native families in the 13 colonies emerged within what historian called “the 50 families” or influential cohorts responsible for driving the War of Independence and the dissolution of the permanent union of America and Great Britain (Bellow, 2003). The Adams, Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson families were part of the 50 families, and thanks to the established relationships of these cohorts; they produced a line of professional politicians, perpetuating the links of these families with the government for many years. The first president of the United States, George Washington, was an active participant of this type of behavior. Curiously, and echoing the relationship of nepotism with maternal altruism, women played an important role within the colonial society by keeping alive the spirit of nepotism and associating their families with social reforms (Boyer, 1978).

Nepotism continued to be part of the life of North America and played a crucial role during the Civil war and reconstruction of a new nation. Through influential generations of families, the United States migrated from farming to an industrialized economy and the country reached wealth, progress, and prosperity. These families advocated for the reconstruction of the country after the Civil war, including the settlement of cities, establishment of lucrative businesses, building the infrastructure of the nation, and the advocacy for economic reforms. However, scholars in opposition to nepotism argued that, in the process of doing this, members of these families enjoyed privileges deprived to other social classes, regardless their lack of talent or aptitude (Brookhiser, 1999).

The beginning of the contemporary political dynasties flourished during this time. Below (2003) argued that many of these family members are perceived in history as “self-made men” although they use considerable influence to move forward in society. The Roosevelt and the Kennedy families are example of this political era. Today, nepotism permeates a great sector of the North American economy, especially with the proliferation of

family businesses. Nevertheless, contemporary literature on organizational behavior reports that nepotism in organization related to low morale, lack of motivation, and unprofessional behavior (Wong & Kleiner, 1994). The most evident problem with nepotism arises when the people hired perform a job are not highly qualified.

In the meantime, family owners who send their children to college are reserving positions for them in their family business. Moreover, some colleges in the United States would give preferential enrollment and treatment to children from families with “legacy preferences” (“The Economist,” 2004). When children of owners come to occupy positions in the family business, other employees could feel lack of sympathy, especially if the person has recently graduated and does not possess work experience. Experts suggest to these individuals to seek employment out of the family business for a while as a way of gaining experience and the eventual respect of co-workers, even within family-oriented environments.

In the contemporary scenario, the Bush family is the most recent political dynasty in the United States. Nepotism permeates other important areas of society, including entertainment. Kramer (1988) stated the long history of nepotism within the television and movie industries. Families’ surnames such as Spelling, Redgrave, Marshall, Barrymore, and Coppola are only a few of the many Hollywood dynasties. As in the business sector, the problem arises when the beneficiary of nepotism cannot perform at the level of quality that a position requires.

United States does not offer many legal requirements for the regulation of nepotism, although the new era of equal opportunity employment has forced organizations to establish clear policies against nepotism (Ford & McLaughlin, 1986). Some companies do not allow spouses working together or the direct supervision of relatives. Employment candidates also must disclose if they have relatives working for the company they aspire to join. However, different companies will decide diverse degrees of rigor in applying anti-nepotistic policies. Another argument against nepotism in the workforce in the United States is the existence of the Affirmative Action, of a series of policies and procedures to avoid discriminatory practices in hiring people, especially from minorities (Kravitz et al., 1997). Still, no evidence exists about the effectiveness of these practices.

Nepotism in Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, is an opposite perceived concept. In Saudi Arabia, nepotism is fundamental to the cultural context. The Arab world, in general, is characterized by family relationships, networks, and mentoring. The word *Wasta* describes this social phenomenon. Managers from other countries making business in the Arab world learn quickly that they cannot underestimate the influence of *Wasta* in the way Arab people manage their social structure, economy, and politics (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). The majority of the people in Saudi Arabia embrace the concept of *Wasta*, reporting that this is a common and professionally valued practice.

Modern scholars (Sidani & Thornberry, 2003) suggested nepotistic practices in the Arab world can be counterproductive but it is too ingrained in the culture to change nepotism for meritocracy. As established before by other authors, Sidani and Thornberry reported that a problem exists when families hire people with poor preparation to execute a job. Concurrently, the same authors argue that when this happens, nepotism can have negative consequences because people feel demoralized, which leads to poor performance and business longevity.

The biggest stigma against nepotism is the hiring of incompetent people (Mulder, 2008), although nepotism is also associated to the power of the oligarchies and their control over shared resources. In North America, for example, nepotism could be also reason for litigation of loss of reputation. However, other scholars praise the benefits of nepotism, especially in the urbanization of cities and industrialization of the nation (Sidani & Thornberry, 2003). An additional argument in favor of nepotism is the example of countries like China and Indonesia, able to reach considerable wealth and economic progress despite their disposition to nepotism. Cultures with tendency to nepotism can develop cohesion and open communication. Mentoring is another aspect of nepotism that can be capitalized productively within the organization. In the United States, the issue of letting couple work together continues to be an issue of controversy.

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