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## Influence Peddling and its Effect on the Selection and Recruitment Processes of Human Talent in Public Institutions of Ecuador

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### Abstract

*Influence peddling remains a persistent problem in institutions worldwide. International organizations and governance experts have highlighted the severity of this issue and its repercussions, eroding the integrity of public institutions and undermining citizens' trust in government administration. This research study analyzes the relationship between influence peddling and the selection and recruitment processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador. Structured surveys were administered to collect information, and statistical analysis techniques were employed to explore the relationships between variables. The results demonstrate a significant association, severity level, transparency, and impact on the quality of public service and the country's development.*

**Keywords:** *influence peddling, human talent, corruption, transparency, public institutions.*

### Introduction

Globally, influence peddling is a phenomenon of global concern that has a significant impact on the selection and recruitment processes of human talent in public institutions. It has been widely recognized as a threat to integrity and transparency in the public sector (*Comisión Económica para América Latina y El Caribe*, 2020). International organizations and governance experts have highlighted the seriousness of this issue and its implications, which undermine the integrity of public institutions and erode citizens' trust in government administration (Calvo, 2016).

In the context of Latin America, influence peddling has been the subject of analysis and debate. Various studies have revealed the detrimental effects of this practice on the selection and recruitment processes of human talent. Research conducted in countries of the region highlights

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how influence peddling distorts meritocracy and negatively affects efficiency and equity in hiring processes (Martínez, R., & Gómez, 2018) .

In Ecuador, research has been conducted to explore the impact of influence peddling on the selection and recruitment processes of human talent in public institutions (Rangel, 2019). According to a report by the General Comptroller's Office, influence peddling has been identified as one of the main causes of lack of transparency and inefficiency in the hiring processes of the Ecuadorian public sector (Contraloría General del Estado, 2019).

The process of recruiting and selecting human talent is a common practice in all organizations, regardless of their size or geographical location. Globally, companies seek to attract and retain the best candidates to fill existing vacancies and ensure the success of their operations. Additionally, factors such as globalization, technological advancements, and cultural diversity have influenced this process. Companies have had to adapt their recruitment and selection strategies to attract the best talent in a global and diverse market (Parmenter, 2016). In Latin America, this process is regulated by the labor laws of each country and may vary depending on the company and the position to be filled. However, there are common stages followed in most cases, ranging from identifying the organization's needs to the final selection of the most suitable candidate. All of these stages should be subject to control bodies that aim to regulate and define mandatory rules, aligning with previously defined policies (Nahón et Bonofiglio, 2007). In Ecuador, it is regulated by various labor regulations and laws, including the Organic Law of Public Service and its Regulation, the Labor Code, and other labor regulations. These laws establish guidelines and requirements that companies must follow to carry out a fair, equitable, and compliant recruitment and selection process (Ley Orgánica de Servicio Público, 2010).

The processes of human talent selection and recruitment face significant challenges due to the prevalence of influence peddling. Despite having regulations and laws that govern these procedures, the phenomenon persists and creates an environment of distrust, lack of fairness, and unequal opportunities for job-seeking candidates (Tablante et Morales Antoniazzi, 2018). Studies such as that conducted by (Yuperel et al., 2020) have demonstrated that the main factors influencing personnel hiring policies are friendships, political alignment, and political influence. Meanwhile (Johnson, A. B., & Smith, 2019) investigated that the impact of influence peddling on the selection and recruitment processes of human talent was present in a significant percentage of hirings, undermining impartiality and equity in the selection process. On the other hand, the work of (García, E. R., López, M. S., 2020) determined the negative consequences of these practices as they generate dissatisfaction among non-benefited candidates and weaken trust in institutions, (Ríos, 2017) mentions that influence peddling also affects the work environment and productivity of companies

This research aims to analyze the impact of influence peddling and its effect on the selection and recruitment processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador. The hypothesis formulated

for this study is: "Does influence peddling influence the selection and recruitment processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador?" This hypothesis focuses on the relationship between influence peddling and the processes of selection and recruitment of human talent.

## Methodology

### Research Methods

The methodology used in this study was based on a deductive approach, supporting claims about influence peddling through ethical principles, current laws and regulations, previous research, and related theories (Sampieri, 2010). Additionally, the case study method was employed to select and analyze relevant cases of influence peddling, identifying similarities, trends, common factors, impacts, and implications in the processes of human talent selection and recruitment (Yin, 1994). Moreover, an exploratory level was conducted to gain an overview of the topic and identify relevant aspects through literature review, exploratory interviews with experts, review of documents, and available news regarding influence peddling in public institutions of Ecuador (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, a descriptive level was used to thoroughly describe and analyze the perception of influence peddling in the processes of human talent selection and recruitment in public institutions. This was done through structured surveys that gathered data on public perception, and statistical analysis techniques were applied to present the results (Tamayo y Tamayo, 2003). Finally, a correlational level was applied to explore possible relationships between variables related to influence peddling in the processes of human talent selection and recruitment in public institutions and public perception (Sampieri, 2010).

### Data Collection and Information Processing Methodology

In order to obtain data and study the relationship between influence peddling and selection processes, the following procedure was used:

**Table 1 - Data collection and information processing procedure**

Procedure	Details
Population and Sample	<p>Population:                      he population for the study consisted of the Ecuadorian population, which according to the (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos de Ecuador, 2023), as a total of 17,757,000 inhabitants.</p> <p>Sample:                      To determine the sample size, the finite calculation formula (López-Roldán et Fachelli, 2015).</p>
Data Collection Instrument Design	<p>Survey:                      A questionnaire consisting of Likert scale questions, aimed at the Ecuadorian population.</p> <p>Interview:                      An interview format directed at public officials from different public institutions in Ecuador.</p>

Validation of Data Collection Instruments	<p>Expert Validation: The data collection instruments were validated by experts according to an established format, where an average adequacy and relevance score was assigned to each questionnaire question.</p> <p>Mathematical Validation: The statistical validation of the data collection instrument was performed using IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25 software, through the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which allowed evaluating the internal consistency and reliability of the measures obtained from the set of questions in the instrument.</p>
Information Collection	<p>To administer the survey data collection instrument, the online tool Google Forms was used. This tool allowed designing the form and collecting responses from participants according to the established sample.</p> <p>The interview was conducted with public servants from different public institutions at the executive level in Ecuador.</p>
Information Processing	<p>The information obtained from the data collection instruments was processed using Excel and IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25 software (figures, tables).</p>
Hypothesis	<p>The hypothesis was defined to determine the relationship between influence trafficking and the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador. It was formulated as follows: Does influence trafficking influence the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador? Taking into account H0 (null hypothesis): Influence trafficking does not influence the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador, and H1 (alternative hypothesis): Influence trafficking does influence the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador.</p>
Definition of Variables	<p>To determine the significance level and correlation of variables, two variables were defined (independent variable: influence trafficking and dependent variable: processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador), which included significant questions from the survey format.</p>
Results	<p>To determine the relationship between variables, the chi-square test and Pearson's correlation coefficient were calculated using IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25 software.</p>

Note: Data Collection and Information Processing Procedure.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 2** – Cross-tabulation table of the relationship between IV: influence trafficking and DV: selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions of Ecuador.

Cross-tabulation table IV*DV										
Count										
	DV									Total
	7	9	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	
IV	5	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5

7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
9	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
10	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5
11	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
12	0	0	0	6	7	0	0	0	0	13
13	0	0	0	5	13	8	5	0	0	31
14	0	0	12	0	27	8	5	0	0	52
15	0	0	0	0	25	12	2	0	0	39
16	0	0	0	8	43	19	10	0	3	83
17	0	0	0	0	6	17	22	3	0	48
18	0	0	0	13	5	5	7	0	0	30
19	0	0	5	1	0	21	21	0	0	48
20	0	0	0	0	13	0	4	0	0	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>384</b>

Note: Results obtained from IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25.

### Pearson's Chi-Square Test Result

Table 3 – Pearson's Chi-Square Test

	Chi-Square Tests		
	Value	df	Asymptotic (Bilateral) Significance
Pearson's Chi-Square	1108,567a	112	,000
Likelihood Ratio	399,469	112	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	50,219	1	,000
Valid N (listwise)	384		

Note: Pearson's Chi-Square Test, results obtained from IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25.

The results of the chi-square tests show a significant association between the traffic of influence

and the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador. Pearson's chi-square and the likelihood ratio obtained high values and p-values of 0.000, indicating a significant difference between the observed and expected values in the contingency table, supporting the alternative hypothesis. The linear-by-linear association test also demonstrated a significant association between the variables. In conclusion, these results provide strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis and support the alternative hypothesis, confirming that the traffic of influence does influence the mentioned processes in public institutions in Ecuador. In this regard, similar studies have found consistent results that support our conclusion that the traffic of influence affects selection and hiring processes in the public sector. For example, a study conducted by (Rodríguez, M., Pérez, J., & López, 2018) found a significant association between the traffic of influence and corruption in public procurement in Latin America. This evidence suggests that the traffic of influence can have a detrimental impact on the selection and hiring of personnel in public institutions. Another study by (González, E., Pérez, R., & Sánchez, 2019) examined the phenomenon of nepotism and the traffic of influence in administration, showing that nepotism and the traffic of influence were common practices in personnel selection in the public sector. Additionally, the study by (Medina, A., Torres, L., & Vargas, 2020) on nepotism in the Ecuadorian public sector revealed that nepotism was a form of traffic of influence used to obtain employment in public institutions. These findings support our hypothesis that the traffic of influence does influence the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador.

**Pearson Correlation Coefficient Calculation Results**

The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient indicate the relationship between two variables, IV (Independent Variable) and DV (Dependent Variable), in relation to the proposed hypothesis.

**Table 4 – Pearson Correlation Coefficients**

		Correlations	
		VI	VD
<b>IV</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	,362**
	Sig. (bilateral)		,000
	N	384	384
<b>DV</b>	Pearson Correlation	,362**	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	
	N	384	384

\*\* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Note: Variable correlation, results obtained from IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25 program.

The Pearson correlation between influence trafficking and the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions of Ecuador was found to be positive and moderate ( $r = 0.362$ ),

supporting the existence of a significant relationship between both variables. These results are consistent with previous research that has identified a positive association between influence trafficking and the processes of selection and hiring in the public sector. For example, a study conducted by (López Gumucio, 2010) found similar results, demonstrating a positive correlation between influence trafficking and the processes of selection and hiring of personnel. Another study carried out by (Yuperel et al., 2020) also supports these findings by identifying a negative influence of influence trafficking on the transparency of selection processes. Likewise, research by (Khairina et al., 2017) showed a positive and significant correlation between influence trafficking and corruption in selection and hiring processes. Collectively, these studies support our conclusion that influence trafficking significantly influences the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions of Ecuador.

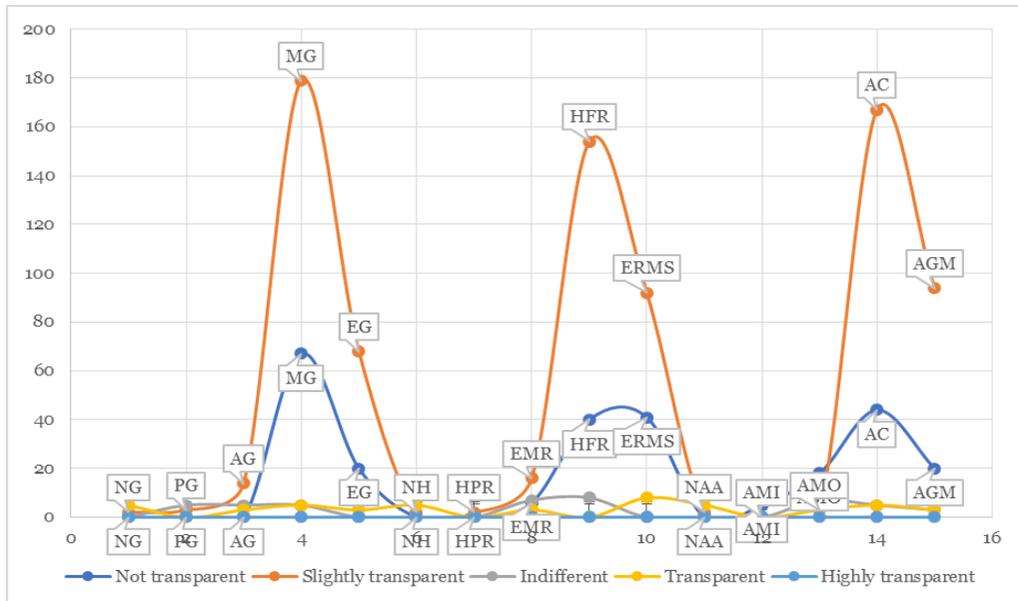
**Table 5** –Relationship between influence trafficking, issues, impact on public service, and transparency in the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions of Ecuador.

	Do you believe that corruption and influence trafficking are serious problems in the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions of Ecuador?					Do you consider that currently the selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions of Ecuador is influenced by political and/or family connections?					Do you believe that influence trafficking in the hiring of human talent negatively affects the quality of public service and the country's development?				
	No	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely	No	Very	Moderate	Strongly	Very significant	Disagree	Affected	Affected	Affected	Affected
Do you consider that currently the processes of selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions of Ecuador are transparent?	0	3	14	179	68	2	2	16	154	92	2	0	3	167	94
Not transparent	0	5	5	5	0	0	0	7	8	0	0	0	7	5	3
Slightly transparent	5	0	3	5	3	5	0	3	0	8	5	0	3	5	3
Indifferent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transparent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Highly transparent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: Relationship between influence trafficking, issues, impact on public service, and transparency

in the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador, results obtained from IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25.

**Figure 1** - Scatter plot depicting the relationship between influence trafficking, issues, impact on public service, and transparency in the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador.



Note: Relationship between influence trafficking, issues, impact on public service, and transparency in the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador, results obtained from Microsoft Excel.

NG: Not Serious, PG: Slightly Serious, AG: Somewhat Serious, MG: Very Serious, EG: Extremely Serious, NH: No Relationship at All, HPR: Few or Minimal Relationship, EMR: Moderate Relationship, HFR: Strong Relationship, ERMS: Very Significant and Predominant Relationship, NAA: Does Not Affect at All, AMI: Minimally Affects, AMO: Moderately Affects, AC: Considerably Affects, AGM: Greatly Affects

The data obtained from the cross-tabulation table reveals the relationship between the responses to the selected questions and the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador. It indicates an association between the severity of corruption and influence trafficking with a lack of transparency. This connection is reflected in Figure 1, where those who perceive these issues as "Very Serious" (246) and "Extremely Serious" (88) also tend to perceive the processes as "Slightly or Not Transparent".

Furthermore, a connection is observed between the "political and/or family influence" and the

"negative impact on the quality of public service" and "lack of transparency in the selection and hiring processes of human talent". Those who perceive a "Strong" (154) or "Very Significant and Predominant" (92) relationship between "selection and hiring of human talent" and "political/family influences" also consider that it considerably affects (167) and greatly affects (94) the quality of public service and the country's development.

In conclusion, the data from the cross-tabulation table shows that those who believe that the selection and hiring of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador is influenced by political and/or family influences indicate that these processes are serious and lack transparency. Additionally, they indicate that this malpractice significantly and greatly affects the quality of public service and the country's development.

The evidence obtained from the cross-tabulation data supports the findings of other studies that examined the relationship between corruption, influence trafficking, and the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions. A study conducted by (Bernal Merchán, 2016), found a significant association between corruption and lack of transparency in the selection and hiring processes in government institutions. These results align with our findings, where those who perceived corruption and influence trafficking as serious also perceived the processes as lacking transparency. According to (Santos, 2015), their study determined that influence trafficking has a significant impact as it has the ability to violate human rights. On the other hand (Rangel, 2019) highlights that influence trafficking can negatively affect the professional development of hired personnel since candidates are not selected based on their skills and abilities, but rather based on their personal relationships (Gutiérrez, 2018). This can have negative consequences for the institution's performance and work environment, as selected candidates may not have the necessary competencies to effectively carry out their tasks, leading to frustration and demotivation among other employees (Cárdenas, 2019), Therefore, it is necessary to carry out a selection process in hiring human talent in order to determine suitable and efficient individuals for the respective positions available (Basurto et Yoza, 2022). According to (Muñoz, 2022), if human talent is hired without considering merit and competition, it results in job instability.

To counteract this issue, the Ecuadorian government has implemented the Technical Norm of the Public Sector Personnel Selection Subsystem, which focuses on preventing influence trafficking. An analysis shows that this norm is feasible and robust as it clearly establishes its objective, which is to ensure a transparent and impartial process with control measures and sanctions for public servants who violate its provisions (Ministerio del Trabajo, 2018). In general, according to (Espinosa, 2011) the feasibility of the norm is high as it comprehensively addresses the prevention of influence trafficking in the public sector personnel selection process. However, it is important to consider that the effective implementation of the norm will depend on the willingness and commitment of the institutions involved in its application, as well as proper supervision and monitoring to ensure compliance. According to (El Comercio, 2023), in their publication, they mention the existence of a report by the General Comptroller's Office that reveals

cases of nepotism within the hiring of officials beyond the legal limit concerning relatives of authorities. Another similar case revealed by the IESS, titled "sanctions for new corruption cases," indicates the initiation of administrative proceedings for nepotism cases against directors within a hospital, due to favoritism in job positions for close relatives (IESS, 2015). This is why the need arises to conduct this research in order to contribute to preventing and reducing corruption in the selection and hiring of personnel in public institutions by identifying the causes, corrupt practices, and risks associated with influence trafficking. This will enable proposing effective measures and policies to prevent its occurrence and strengthen transparency, fairness, and meritocracy in these processes.

## **Conclusiones**

This study, through hypothesis testing, has conclusively demonstrated the existence of a significant relationship between influence trafficking and the selection and hiring processes of human talent in public institutions in Ecuador. Statistical methods have been used to obtain results that support this connection. The positive correlation found indicates that as influence trafficking increases, a lack of transparency is generated in the selection and hiring processes. These findings are consistent with previous research that has established a significant association between influence trafficking and corruption in hiring processes. Furthermore, it has been observed that this connection has a negative impact on the quality of public service and has detrimental consequences for overall institutional performance and the work environment.

On the other hand, the results obtained from interviews with public servants indicated a lack of transparency and a significant influence of political and personal factors in the selection and hiring processes, resulting in a negative evaluation of the process, ranging from poor to average. Additionally, they mentioned that there is excessive staff turnover in institutions, mainly due to changes in authorities. When authorities leave and new ones come in, each character brings their own collaborators, which influences the dismissal and hiring of new personnel in the institution, resulting in job instability, disruption of public services, and a lack of transparency.

In light of these results, the research serves as a tool to raise awareness about the seriousness and negative consequences of influence trafficking. By disseminating the findings, society at large, public institutions, public servants, researchers, and stakeholders involved in the selection and hiring processes of human talent can be sensitized to the importance of acting ethically and promoting equal opportunities through the implementation of measures and policies to prevent and combat this issue, thereby improving transparency, equity, and efficiency in these processes (Ley Orgánica de Servicio Público, 2010). This entails strengthening and implementing stricter controls and promoting a culture of meritocracy in the public sector. By doing so, a more merit-based and competency-driven selection and hiring of human talent can be achieved, resulting in the recruitment of highly qualified, committed professionals selected fairly (Gudiño, 2022), therefore, it is necessary for public institutions in Ecuador to take concrete actions to address this

problem and promote a human talent management based on ethical principles and transparency (Constitucion del Ecuador, 2008).

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