



Meritocracy vs Tradition: AVPs' Perspectives on Promotion Practices and Organisational Justice in Karachi's Private Banks

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Abstract: *This qualitative study explores how Assistant Vice Presidents (AVPs) in Karachi's private banking sector perceive promotion practices, weighing meritocratic ideals against traditional influences like nepotism and seniority. Fifteen AVPs from several diverse banks were purposively selected; data saturation occurred at interview 12 and was confirmed by three additional interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between January and March 2025 and then analysed thematically. Four themes emerged: (1) Meritocracy in Principle vs. Practice, (2) Perceptions of Fairness and Organizational Justice, (3) Influences on Morale and Retention, and (4) Navigating and Improving Promotion Systems. Participants described a tension between formal merit-based policies and informal patronage networks. Ethical-leadership cues, i.e., leaders' refusal of "sifarish" (personal recommendations), amplified or mitigated justice perceptions, extending the ethical-leadership theory to a high-power-distance setting. Subjective factors and personal ties frequently overshadowed performance, producing procedural and distributive injustice and driving demotivation, cynicism, and turnover intent. Societally, fairer promotion systems could curb the professional brain drain and strengthen public trust in Pakistan's private sector. The study enriches organisational justice models by distinguishing benign seniority from corrosive nepotism and underscores cultural moderators' role. Practical recommendations include cross-functional promotion committees, KPI-based dashboards, bias audits, and leadership accountability linked to fairness metrics. These data-driven, transparent mechanisms offer a roadmap for transitioning from aspirational to authentic meritocracy.*

Keywords: *Meritocracy; Traditional Promotion Practices; Organizational Justice; Assistant Vice Presidents; Private Banks; Karachi; Nepotism; Favouritism; Semi-Structured Interviews; Thematic Analysis.*

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Introduction:

Promotion practices are critical to human resource management, as they directly affect employee morale, career development, and perceptions of fairness within organisations. In an ideal meritocracy, promotions are based on an individual's performance, qualifications, and abilities. In contrast, traditional practices in some contexts may prioritise factors such as seniority, personal relationships, or patronage (Mun & Kodoma, 2022). This tension is most visible in settings where longstanding cultural norms favour nepotism and favouritism, forms of preferential treatment based on kinship or personal connections (Zeeshan & Qazi, 2023). This study focuses on private banks in Karachi, Sindh, to investigate how mid-level managers (specifically Assistant Vice Presidents, or AVPs) perceive and navigate these promotion practices and the resulting sense of organisational justice. Karachi is Pakistan's financial hub, hosting headquarters and branches of numerous private banks. These banks operate in a competitive industry where talent management is crucial. However, like many organisations in developing countries, they exist within a broader socio-cultural context that may tolerate or even encourage traditional patronage. Recent work by Zeeshan and Qazi (2023) shows that nepotism and favouritism remain "ingrained" in Pakistani institutions, with personal ties often outweighing merit in hiring and promotions. Such practices can undermine the principles of meritocracy and lead to perceptions of injustice among employees.

Organisational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness in workplace decisions and processes. It is typically categorised into distributive justice (fairness of outcomes, e.g., who gets promoted), procedural justice (fairness of the processes that lead to those outcomes), and interactional justice (fairness in interpersonal treatment and information sharing) (Colquitt et al., 2001). Fair promotion practices are key to distributive and procedural justice in any organisation (Akram et al., 2022). When promotions are perceived as merit-based and transparent, employees are more likely to trust leadership and feel committed; conversely, if promotions are seen as influenced by favouritism or opaque criteria, perceptions of injustice arise, potentially leading to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover (Shah et al., 2025; Arici et al., 2019). The banking sector in Pakistan has undergone significant changes over the decades, moving from nationalisation in the 1970s to widespread privatisation in the 1990s (Samad & Faraz, 2024). Although today's private

banks have more autonomy and formal HR policies, including codes of ethics that discourage nepotism in hiring and promotions (HBL, 2025), the persistence of informal, traditional practices remains an open question. Indeed, societal, the lack of meritocracy is a significant concern. A Transparency International Pakistan survey (2023) found that favouritism and lack of merit were seen as the most prevalent corruption issues in the country, underscoring how deeply favouritism is perceived to affect career opportunities across sectors.

Despite growing evidence, most research is quantitative and overlooks employees lived experiences. Quantitative insight into how mid-level managers interpret and respond to nepotism is scarce (Rasheed et al., 2025). Therefore, AVPs who witness, and experience promotion decisions are under-represented in the literature (Serfraz et al., 2022). This study, therefore, captures their perspectives to illuminate how they reconcile meritocratic ideals with traditional influences in Karachi's private banking sector.

Understanding these perspectives is crucial for both scholarship and practice. Fair advancement is crucial for retaining skilled professionals and sustaining ethical organisational climates. Pakistan's professionals frequently cite favouritism in promotions as a driver of frustration or emigration (Mehmood, 2025). Through foregrounding AVPs' voices, this research offers significant insight into promotion dynamics that surveys alone cannot capture, providing actionable guidance for bank leadership and HR policymakers seeking to enhance transparency and fairness. This study addresses a vital question in organisational behaviour and human resource management within the context of Karachi's private banks: to what extent do promotion practices reflect meritocratic principles versus traditional patronage, and how do these influence AVPs' perceptions of organisational justice?

Literature Review

This literature review examines three key areas relevant to the study: (1) Meritocracy vs. Traditional Promotion Practices, including nepotism and favouritism, in organisational contexts with a focus on Pakistan and similar cultures; (2) Organisational Justice Theory and how fair or unfair promotion practices influence perceptions of justice; and (3) empirical findings on the effects of promotion fairness on employee outcomes.

Meritocracy and Traditional Promotion Practices

Meritocracy is the principle that advancement in an organisation should be based on merit, typically measured through performance, skills, and qualifications rather than extraneous factors like personal relationships or tenure (Lewis, 1998; Yiu, 2019). In an ideal meritocratic system, every employee has an equal opportunity to be rewarded and promoted based on their contributions and abilities (Dries & Kaše, 2023). Traditional promotion practices, however, often incorporate other considerations. In many cultures, especially where collectivist values and power distance are high, it is common to see promotions influenced by seniority (length of service), nepotism (favouring relatives), or cronyism (favouring friends or loyalists). In Pakistan and similar South Asian contexts, social hierarchies and kinship ties have historically influenced organisational structures. Scholars have noted that nepotism and favouritism are prevalent in both public and private organisations across Pakistan, rooted in strong family and ethnic bonds (Zeeshan & Qazi, 2023). Nepotism is defined as using one's position to advance relatives regardless of merit (often ignoring more qualified candidates) (Schilpzand et al., 2025).

In contrast, favouritism involves giving preferential treatment to friends or insiders over others who might be more deserving (Pearce et al., 2024). These practices are often viewed as antithetical to ethical human resource management standards. Zeeshan and Qazi (2023) describe nepotism and favouritism as common yet unethical practices that undermine fairness in HR decisions (Matimbwa & Kamala, 2024; Inegbedion et al., 2024). Similarly, Wajidi and Shabib-ul-Hasan (2023) and Ahmed et al., (2024) observed that such practices have become ingrained in the organisational culture in Pakistan. International perspectives echo these concerns. In a cross-cultural study, researchers found that cronyism and nepotism were more accepted in certain Asian and Middle Eastern countries compared to Western countries, often justified by cultural norms of loyalty and family obligation (Alsarhan et al., 2024; AL-Twal & Cook, 2021). However, even in cultures where it is common, nepotism tends to generate tension between modern professional management ideals and traditional expectations. For instance, the concept of 'wasta' in Arab countries (akin to leveraging connections for favours) is recognised as a widespread practice that can conflict with meritocratic recruitment and promotion, leading organisations to struggle with balancing

local customs and global standards (Alothmany, 2024; Al-thbah, 2021). Such practices can be seen as a form of corruption in the workplace, eroding the principle of equal opportunity. Indeed, Tobondo et al., (2024) classify nepotism as an abuse of entrusted power for private gain, which can cause institutional inefficiency and public distrust.

In the specific context of Pakistan's banking sector, there is historical evidence of non-meritocratic practices. During the period of bank nationalisation (1970s–1980s), promotions often required not just a solid track record but also the favour of powerful officials (Khan, 1998). The Pakistan Banking Council, which oversaw nationalised banks, was accused of blatant nepotism and promotion favouritism – bankers reportedly had to appease council members with gifts to secure career advancement (Mian, 2023). This led to frustration among competent employees and contributed to many seeking careers abroad. While the banking sector has since been privatised and presumably professionalised, remnants of a patronage culture may still linger. Family-owned banks or banks with strong political affiliations might still face pressures to “take care of” specific individuals (Tirmizi, 2020). A case study noted that nepotism can be deeply ingrained in organisational culture, particularly where ownership and management overlap (Arslan & Alqatan, 2020).

On the other hand, efforts have been made to promote meritocracy in Pakistan's corporate sector. Many leading private banks have adopted formal HR policies to ensure fairness (Awan et al., 2020). For example, HBL (2025) explicitly states in its Code of Ethics that while hiring relatives is not banned, no employee may influence hiring or promotion decisions for a close relative and that family relationships “shall not be considered a criterion” in promotions. Such policies are designed to maintain the integrity of the personnel process. The question remains, however, how effectively these policies are implemented and perceived at different organisational levels, which is a focus of the current study.

Organisational Justice and Promotion Fairness

Organisational justice is a framework that describes how fairness in decision-making processes and outcomes affects employee attitudes and behaviours (Kumasey et al., 2021). Greenberg (1987) introduced the term to organisational research, and subsequent work (e.g., Liljegren & Ekberg, 2009)

delineated multiple facets of justice as mentioned earlier: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Promotions in an organisation touch on all these facets:

- **Distributive justice:** Do employees believe that promotions (a valued reward/outcome) are allocated based on fair criteria (e.g., performance and qualifications)? If an employee who works hard and meets targets is passed over in favour of someone viewed as less deserving, the outcome is seen as unfair.
- **Procedural justice:** Are promotion procedures and criteria transparent, consistent, and unbiased? A process perceived as secretive or subjective (for example, if decisions are made “behind closed doors” or if rules are bent for certain individuals) undermines trust in the system.
- **Interactional justice:** How are the decisions communicated and enacted? Even if a promotion decision is unfavourable to an employee, treating them with respect and providing a rationale can mitigate feelings of injustice.

Research consistently shows that perceived unfairness in promotion decisions can harm employee morale, trust in management, and organisational commitment (Tachie-Donkor et al., 2024). When employees suspect that promotions are based on favouritism rather than merit, it contributes to a climate of organisational politics. It diminishes overall justice perceptions (Shah et al., 2025). Ferris et al. (2002) note that high perceptions of organisational politics often coincide with lower organisational justice and can lead to stress and withdrawal behaviours (Nguyen-Viet & Vo Tri Chau, 2024). In Pakistan’s context, Zeeshan and Qazi (2023) provided evidence that organisational nepotism increases perceptions of politics and lowers employee morale. Similarly, Rasheed et al., (2025) found that nepotism negatively impacted job satisfaction and commitment among employees in Pakistani firms, largely due to perceived unfairness in how rewards and promotions were distributed. A recent international study by Khairy and Elzek (2023) directly examined nepotism through the lens of justice: they found that perceived nepotism had a significant adverse effect on employees’ job satisfaction. This effect was mediated by procedural and distributive injustice. In other words, employees who observed nepotistic promotion decisions felt the process was unjust and the outcome inequitable, which in turn eroded their satisfaction at work (Mumtaz, 2025).

Beyond immediate job attitudes, persistent unfairness in promotions can trigger long-term organisational issues (Shi & Huang, 2022). Turnover intentions often rise when high-performing employees feel they have been treated unjustly or passed over without merit (Kwon & Jang, 2022). Research in Pakistan and elsewhere has shown that favouritism and nepotism are associated with higher employee stress, cynicism, and a desire to leave the organisation (Kashif, 2024). Fatigue from unfair treatment can also result in disengagement, on which employees may reduce their effort or stop striving for advancement if they believe the system is rigged, a phenomenon which ultimately hurts organisational productivity and innovation (Saban, 2024). On the positive side, when employees perceive that promotions are decided fairly and transparently, it boosts their trust in management. It can enhance performance (Jiang & Shen, 2023). As one study with public employees indicated, a higher perception of meritocracy was strongly linked to higher organisational justice perceptions, suggesting that emphasising merit-based practices can improve the overall sense of fairness in the workplace (Park & Jeon, 2021).

Effects of (Un)Fair Promotion Practices

Numerous studies, both in Pakistan and internationally, have documented the detrimental effects of nepotism and favouritism on various organisational outcomes. A survey of bank employees in another major city concluded that nepotism and favouritism in the banking sector led to increased job stress, reduced job satisfaction and increased intentions to quit (Serfraz et al., 2022). Employees who witness or experience unfair advancement of colleagues often feel demotivated and undervalued (Grimwood, 2022). Over time, this can foster a toxic work environment characterised by distrust and reduced teamwork. Mian (2023) observed that in Pakistani organisations, when employees perceive that personal relationships dominate promotion and reward processes instead of merit, they feel injustice and disparity, leading to disengagement from their work duties (Iqbal & Ahmad, 2020). Repeated incidents of favouritism can create a culture where employees believe that advancing their career is less about what you do and more about who you know—a belief that corrodes the motivation to perform optimally (Pagano & Picariello, 2023). Conversely, the promise of fair, merit-based promotions can have positive effects. In environments where employees trust that good performance will be rewarded, there is evidence of higher organisational

commitment and lower cynicism (Audenaert et al., 2020). Employees in Turkish public organisations who felt their workplace emphasised merit and equal opportunity also reported a stronger sense of organisational justice and were more satisfied with advancement opportunities (Geçkil, 2022). This reinforces that transparency and fairness in promotion criteria (such as clear performance metrics, standardised evaluation processes, and checks against bias) are crucial for maintaining a healthy workplace.

The literature indicates a complex interplay between cultural tradition and modern organisational principles in shaping promotion practices. Pakistan's private banking sector sits at the intersection of these forces: on the one hand, pressed to adopt global best practices and compete for talent (favouring meritocracy), and on the other hand, embedded in a local culture where patronage can influence decisions. This study builds on the literature by qualitatively examining how these dynamics are perceived by those directly involved – the AVPs – and how they interpret the fairness and consequences of their banks' promotion practices.

Research Questions and Objectives

Building on the identified gap and literature, this study is guided by the following research questions (RQs) and objectives:

Research Question & Objective

Research Question: How do AVPs in Karachi's private banks perceive the criteria and processes for promotion within their organisations, particularly in terms of merit-based versus non-merit factors (e.g., seniority, favouritism, personal relationships)?

Research Objective: To explore and document AVP's perceptions and experiences regarding the fairness and criteria of promotion decisions in private banks, with a focus on tension between merit-based and traditional promotion practices.

This research addresses this question and objective, and the study aims to shed light on an under-researched area and provide practical recommendations for fostering a more equitable workplace in Karachi's banking industry.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative design to explore AVPs' lived experiences and perceptions regarding promotion practices in Karachi's private banking sector. A phenomenological approach is well-suited to capture deep, subjective meanings attached to complex organisational phenomena i.e., meritocracy and favouritism (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Sampling and Participants

A purposive, maximum-variation sampling strategy by Patton (2014) was used to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. Fifteen AVPs aged between their 40s and 50s, with 7-18 years of banking experience, were selected from seven major private banks: Habib Bank Limited, Allied Bank, Summit Bank, Meezan Bank, Bank Islami, Standard Chartered, and Bank Al-Falah Limited. Sample size was determined based on data saturation, which was reached by the 12th interview. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm thematic stability, aligning with the recommendations of Guest et al., (2006) and Creswell and Poth (2017).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between January and March 2025, lasting 45-60 minutes each. Interviews were held at participant-selected locations i.e., private bank meeting rooms, quiet cafes, and via secure video conferencing. The interview guide included open-ended questions addressing promotion criteria, experiences of favouritism or patronage, perceptions of fairness, and suggestions for improving HR practices. Clarifying prompts i.e., "Can you elaborate on that?" were used to enhance depth and accuracy.

Data Validity and Ethical Considerations

To ensure data validity, the steps were taken include: triangulation through participant selection from multiple banks; member checking, where selected participants were invited to review their transcripts for accuracy; peer debriefing with two qualitative research experts to cross-validate coding themes; audit trail maintained throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Institute of Public Administration, Shah Abdul Latif University (Ref: IPA/IRB/2024/10/04). All participants provided informed consent.

Anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and data was stored securely using encrypted, password-protected digital storage.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: Familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Themes were derived both inductively from participant narratives and deductively from existing literature on organisational justice and meritocracy. While manual coding was used for conceptual depth, coding consistency was checked by an independent reviewer to enhance inter-coder reliability.

Table1:

Interviews

Theme	Node (Sub-theme)	Definition	Quote
1. Meritocracy on Paper vs. Patronage	Formal policy vs. practice	Gap between documented meritocracy... in practice, merit-based criteria and someone's promotion was actual decision making.	"On paper, we're a pure a done deal long before evaluations." (AVP-F)
	Personal connections ("sifarish")	Influence of patronage networks or relationships on promotion outcomes.	"If a higher-up puts in a word for you, that carries more weight than any performance score." (AVP-L)
	Seniority norm	Implicit rule that tenure alone can trigger years, your turn comes, promotion regardless of even if others outperform performance.	"It's like a queue—stay X alone can trigger years, your turn comes, performance. you." (AVP-D)
	Organizational variation	Differences across banks/departments in the degree of merit vs. relationships patronage.	"In our multinational bank you must prove yourself through results... relationships won't save you if you underperform." (AVP-I)

Theme	Node (Sub-theme)	Definition	Quote
2. Perceptions of Fairness & Transparency	Distributive justice (“who deserves it”)	Fairness of promotion outcomes—whether high performers are rewarded over less-deserving candidates.	“One individual who lags in performance got promoted, while top performers were left out—it felt unjust.” (AVP-K)
	Procedural justice (transparency)	Openness and clarity of appraisal processes and criteria.	“We submit self-appraisals and then it’s a black box—we just get results with no explanation.” (AVP-E)
	Procedural justice (consistency)	Uniform application of XYZ training; rules across candidates and cycles.	“One year they required someone got promoted without it—it shows rules are bent.” (AVP-H)
	Interactional justice (feedback)	Respectful communication and rationale given to those passed over.	“My boss called me, gave constructive feedback, and encouraged me to apply again—I felt treated with respect.” (AVP-C)
3. Influence on Morale & Career Outlook	Demotivation & reduced effort	Withdrawal of discretionary effort after witnessing unfair promotions.	“Why work late every night if promotions are decided based on connections?” (AVP-L)
	Job satisfaction and cynicism	Overall happiness or resentment linked to perceived fairness.	“I feel proud here when performance is rewarded—it motivates me. But at my old bank, favoritism created a toxic atmosphere.” (AVP-I & AVP-D)
	Turnover intentions	Thoughts or actions toward leaving the organization due to unfair promotion practices.	“I’ve been here 9 years, but if I’m overlooked again for the wrong reasons, I might move on.” (AVP-J)

Theme	Node (Sub-theme)	Definition	Quote
4. Coping Strategies & Calls for Change	Psychological safety & voice	Willingness to speak up unjust, I even hesitate to or remain silent based on raise other issues—I fear justice perceptions.	“When the system feels they won’t value my opinion.” (AVP-E)
	Coping by networking	Pursuing informal visibility strategies to by higher-ups—it doesn’t offset patronage.	“I started joining informal gatherings to get noticed by higher-ups—it doesn’t guarantee promotion, but it helps.” (AVP-G)
	Alternate career paths	Seeking lateral moves or different units perceived as more meritocratic.	“I switched from operations to corporate banking because promotions there seemed performance-driven.” (AVP-D)
	Peer support & mentorship	Reliance on colleagues for emotional support and strategy sharing.	“We have informal peer mentorship—talking it out with fellow AVPs helps strategize together.” (AVP-F)
	Transparency enhancements	Requests for clear criteria, communication, and feedback channels.	“If management laid out what they look for in the next role and stuck to it, rumors would vanish.” (AVP-E)
	Structural reforms	Proposals for committees, bias audits, and leadership accountability to reduce favoritism.	“Have multi-stakeholder committees and audit promotion decisions—to dilute single-actor bias.” (AVP-C & AVP-I)
	Career development pathways	Calls for formal management development programs, milestones, and external mentors.	“A two-year development pipeline with transparent milestones and mentors would make promotions clearly skill-based.” (AVP-L)

Findings

Each theme is discussed below with representative quotes and examples. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms (e.g., “AVP-A”, “AVP-B”, or generic first names) are used when quoting participants. Ellipses (...) within quotes indicate minor omissions for brevity, and text in brackets provides clarifications where necessary.

Theme 1: Meritocracy on Paper vs. Patronage in Practice

All participants acknowledged that their organisations espouse merit-based promotion policies in official documents or HR manuals. However, a recurrent sentiment was that reality often diverges from these ideals. This theme captures the perceived gap between formal policy (or rhetoric) and informal practice.

“Officially merit-based, unofficially something else”: Many AVPs noted that their banks have performance appraisal systems and competency frameworks meant to guide promotions. Yet, they questioned how much these truly determine outcomes. As AVP-F wryly remarked, “On paper, we are a pure meritocracy – KPIs, performance reviews, 360-feedback, you name it. In practice, though, I have seen cases where someone’s promotion was a done deal long before the evaluations were even completed.” This suggests a predetermined element where factors outside formal evaluations might influence decisions.

Role of personal connections and favouritism: A strong subtheme was the influence of personal relationships—whether familial ties, friendships, or mentor-protégé dynamics—on promotions. AVP-B, for instance, shared an experience: “We had a situation where an individual was promoted to VP despite average performance. It turns out his family was well-acquainted with a couple of board members. It is not written anywhere that this should matter, but it obviously did.” Another participant, Sara (pseudonym), noted, “It is not always blatant nepotism like a relative – sometimes it is just being in the ‘good books’ of a senior executive. People who socialise with the bosses or flatter them often seem to get ahead faster.” These comments resonate with the notion that cronyism (favouring close associates) and building personal rapport with decision-makers can significantly effect one’s career progression, overshadowing objective criteria.

Several AVPs used the local term "sifarish" (Urdu for recommendation or patronage) when describing promotion practices. AVP-L explained, "Sifarish culture is alive in banking. If a higher-up puts in a word for you, that carries more weight than any performance score. It is an open secret." This indicates a traditional influence where patronage networks circumvent formal procedures. A few participants gave examples of colleagues who, lacking strong performance, managed to rise due to alignment with influential mentors within the bank.

Seniority and "waiting your turn": Aside from outright favouritism, some described a more benign traditional factor: seniority or tenure. Participants noted an implicit norm in a couple of banks that people are promoted roughly in order of years served. AVP-D said, "There is this unspoken rule – you stay X years at a grade, you will likely get promoted when your turn comes, even if others might outperform you. It is like a queue." This can be seen as a tradition prioritising loyalty and longevity, which sometimes conflicts with pure meritocracy, where a star performer might leap ahead of longer-tenured peers. Some AVPs viewed this practice as fair in a cultural sense ("respect for experience"). In contrast, others felt it held back high-achievers and protected mediocre long-timers.

Variation across banks and departments: Not all participants painted the same picture. A few noted that their bank (or specific department) was largely merit-driven. Working at a multinational bank, AVP-I claimed, "In our bank, there is very little tolerance for favouritism – you have to prove yourself through results. Of course, relationships help, but they will not save you if you underperform." Meanwhile, AVP-C contrasted her experience between the two banks: "My previous bank was very old-school; promotions were often a 'reward' for loyalty or whom you knew. The bank I am at now still has some politics, but I see much more emphasis on targets and qualifications. So, it does depend on the leadership's mindset." This highlights that while the meritocracy vs. patronage tension is widespread, the degree to which traditional practices prevail can differ, potentially reflecting each organisation's culture set by top management.

Theme 1 reveals that AVPs perceive a discrepancy between the ideal of meritocracy championed by official policies and the reality of promotions influenced by personal connections, favouritism, and sometimes seniority

traditions. This set the stage for how they judge the fairness of these practices, which is explored in the next theme.

Theme 2: Perceptions of Fairness and Transparency

This theme delves into AVPs' judgments about the fairness of promotion processes in their banks, aligning with the concept of organisational justice. It comprises views on both distributive justice (fairness of who gets promoted) and procedural justice (fairness of how those decisions are made). A closely related aspect discussed by participants was transparency—how open and transparent the criteria and processes are.

Distributive justice – "Who deserves it?": Many AVPs reflected on specific promotion outcomes to gauge fairness. A standard measure compared who got promoted versus who they believed deserved to be. AVP-K recounted, "Last year, when the promotion list came out, many of us were stunned. One individual in our unit – often late and lags in performance – got promoted, whereas another who consistently exceeded targets did not. It felt unjust." Such instances led participants to conclude that outcomes were not purely based on merit, hurting their sense of distributive justice. As AVP-G put it, "When hard work does not pay off and instead you see opportunism rewarded, you question why bother giving your best." This sentiment echoes the classic reaction to violations of equity theory, where an imbalance between contributions and rewards causes distress.

However, not all outcomes were seen as unfair. A few participants gave credit when they saw deserving colleagues promoted. AVP-A noted, "To be fair, in many cases, the people who got promoted were competent and earned it. It is just those few cases of favouritism that ruin the overall trust." This points out that while favouritism cases stick out, a baseline of merit-based promotions does exist in the mix, and participants acknowledge those. The salience of unfair cases appears to be high—one or two nepotistic promotions could overshadow ten fair ones in terms of effect on morale; a phenomenon aligned with psychological research that negative events often have more potent effects than positive ones.

Procedural justice – transparency and consistency: A major point raised by AVPs was the lack or presence of transparency in how promotion decisions are made. In several banks, participants described the promotion process as opaque. AVP-E shared, "Honestly, I do not fully know what happens in the

promotion committee meetings. We submit our self-appraisals, and our managers write evaluations, but after that, it is a black box. We just get results. No explanation is given for why X was promoted, and Y was not." This opacity fuels speculation and the perception of unfairness since employees are left to guess the reasons—often assuming favouritism if outcomes are unexpected. As AVP-J quipped, "In the absence of information, people will make their own stories—usually that so-and-so must have had a 'reference' (sifarish)."

On the other hand, a few banks apparently practised more transparency. AVP-I mentioned that at his bank, HR actually communicates the general criteria and even provides brief feedback to those passed over, which he found helpful: "They tell us roughly: 'this year, the focus was on leadership skills' or they encourage you by saying you are on track for next cycle if you achieve certain goals. So even if I missed a promotion, I felt the process was understandable, and I could accept it." This approach aligns with higher procedural and interactional justice—fair processes and respectful communication—which can mitigate adverse reactions to not being promoted.

Consistency (or lack thereof): Consistency in applying rules was another factor. Participants were sensitive to whether standards seemed to shift, or exceptions were made. AVP-H pointed out, "One year they said, no promotions without completing XYZ training—fine. Nevertheless, then someone got promoted without it. That kind of inconsistency sends a signal that rules can be bent for some people." Such instances were cited as evidence of favouritism or at least special treatment. Conversely, when policies were followed uniformly, it was seen as fair: "In my department, everyone knows you need at least three years in the current position and an 'exceeds expectations' rating to be eligible. Those who meet it usually get promoted when a slot opens. It is pretty systematic," said AVP-M, indicating a sense of fairness because the criteria were applied to all.

Interactional justice – communication and respect: Although not initially a focus of the research questions, how decisions were communicated naturally arose. Some AVPs felt disrespected by how promotions were handled. For example, AVP-B mentioned that in a previous cycle, he learned through the office grapevine, rather than official communication, that promotions had been decided. He was not on the list: "It would have been better if my manager

sat me down and gave me feedback. Instead, I found out casually, which was quite hurtful after putting in effort all year." Others noted that when promotions are announced, little rationale is given, which can feel dismissive of those passed over. There were positive notes, too: a few described managers who took time to explain decisions. AVP-C recalled, "When I did not get promoted last year, my boss actually called me, gave me constructive feedback and encouraged me to apply again next time. I appreciated that—it softened the blow, and I felt I was treated with respect." This shows the human element in perceptions of fairness: being treated fairly in the process, even if the outcome is disappointing, can preserve trust.

Theme 2 illustrates those perceptions of fairness among AVPs are mixed but often lean towards scepticism. The lack of transparency and perceived inconsistency in promotions has led several participants to view the processes as unjust. The result is a cautious or cynical attitude. As some put it, they feel promotions are "not entirely merit-based" and thus not entirely fair. Those who experienced more transparent and criteria-driven processes expressed higher acceptance of outcomes. These perceptions of justice (or injustice) were closely tied to how participants felt and behaved at work, which leads to Theme 3.

Theme 3: Influence on Morale and Career Outlook

This theme captures the personal and collective effect of the promotion practices, as perceived by the AVPs, on their motivation, commitment, and career decisions. When employees see a system as unfair, organisational justice theory predicts adverse outcomes such as reduced commitment or increased intention to leave, which was reflected in many of the participants' accounts.

Demotivation and reduced discretionary effort: A number of AVPs admitted that witnessing favouritism in promotions had a demoralising effect on them. AVP-L confessed, "After I saw how things went in the last cycle, to be honest, I stopped going the extra mile. It is like, why should I kill myself working late every night if, in the end, promotions are a done deal based on connections?" Such statements indicate a withdrawal of organisational citizenship behaviours—those extra efforts and proactive initiatives through which employees may withhold if they feel the system does not reward merit. AVP-H noted a dip in enthusiasm: "I still do my job well, but that spark, that

eagerness to exceed expectations... it is a bit diminished now. I am just doing what is required, not much more." This highlights a potentially serious implication for organisations: perceived unfairness in advancement can sap the proactive energy of talented employees.

Job satisfaction and morale: Some participants connected fair or unfair promotions to their overall job satisfaction. AVP-A said, "Knowing that we have a fair chance for growth is a big part of being happy at work. When that is in doubt, it is hard to stay positive." In banks where they felt meritocracy was upheld, AVPs expressed greater satisfaction. For example, AVP-I was upbeat: "I feel proud to be part of a system that rewards performance. It motivates me to contribute more." In contrast, AVP-D described how persistent favouritism at his previous employer led to a toxic atmosphere: "People would gossip and vent all the time. There was much resentment. A couple of my colleagues gave up trying and did the bare minimum. It was not a healthy environment." Such resentment can manifest as cynicism and even passive-aggressive behaviours, which are symptomatic of withdrawal and workplace deviance in response to injustice.

Loyalty and commitment to the organisation: Promotion practices also influenced whether AVPs saw a long-term future with their bank. Several participants indicated that they would consider leaving if they continued to perceive the system as rigged or stagnant. AVP-J shared his inner deliberation: "I have been with this bank 9 years. I love my work, but if I keep getting overlooked for the wrong reasons, I might need to move on, either to another bank or another country even. I want to grow, and I will go where merit is valued." This is a critical point for retention. A couple of participants indeed mentioned colleagues who left the bank (or were actively job-hunting) after experiencing what they felt was an unfair denial of promotion. AVP-B said, "We lost one of our best relationship managers last year; he did not get promoted and felt it was favouritism. A foreign bank picked him up. Honestly, I do not blame him." This anecdote echoes broader concerns about brain drain and turnover caused by nepotism and lack of merit-based progression. On the flip side, AVPs who saw fairness were more inclined to stay. AVP-C noted, "I have stuck with this bank even when I had outside offered because I appreciate that they promote from within fairly. That makes me feel my loyalty will pay off eventually."

Psychological safety and speaking up: Interestingly, how the promotion system was perceived also affected whether AVPs felt comfortable voicing concerns or ideas in the workplace. AVP-E said, “When you feel the system is unjust, you even hesitate to speak up about other issues. For example, if management does not value fairness, will they value my opinion? It creates a communication gap.” While this was not a universal sentiment, it suggests that justice perceptions can influence not just direct outcomes like motivation but also the broader psychological climate—trust in leadership and openness. Conversely, AVP-I in the more meritocratic bank said, “I feel heard and valued here, partly because I see that our contributions count toward our growth. That makes me more confident in raising my voice for constructive input.”

Personal coping strategies: The effect theme also ties in with how individuals coped, which transitions into Theme 4. Some AVPs talked about how they personally manage their morale. Strategies ranged from focusing on personal development (to strengthen their merit regardless of favouritism) to seeking mentors or allies. A few admitted to engaging in a bit of “networking” themselves upon realising its importance. AVP-G candidly said, “I used to avoid office politics, but after seeing how things work, I started making sure I am visible to the higher-ups—joining the sports club they play in, attending informal gatherings. It does not guarantee anything, but it improves my odds in this environment.” This indicates that unfair systems can nudge even those who prefer merit to adapt by playing the game, potentially perpetuating the cycle of patronage.

Theme 3 underscores that the perceived fairness of promotion practices has tangible effects on AVPs’ work attitudes and intentions. Fair practices tend to bolster morale, motivation, and commitment. In contrast, unfair practices erode them, leading to what some described as a “clock in, clock out” mentality or an exit strategy. These findings align with established research linking organisational justice to outcomes like job satisfaction and turnover (Rasheed et al., 2025). However, here, we see the vivid personal narratives behind those statistics.

Theme 4: Coping Strategies and Calls for Change

This theme captures the personal and collective responses of AVPs to the realities of promotion practices in their organisations, detailing both how they

cope with perceived injustices and the specific recommendations they make for moving toward greater meritocracy. Like Theme 3, participants shared detailed narratives about their internal reactions and strategies they have adopted to either mitigate negative influences or influence the system.

Coping Strategies:

AVPs described how they cope with a system that often appears skewed in favour of personal connections. Many reported that rather than confronting the issues directly, they adapt by seeking alternate routes for career advancement. For example, AVP-D stated, “If my current department is saturated or biased, maybe another unit will value my work more. I switched from operations to corporate banking because I heard promotions were more performance-driven there.” This shows that some AVPs are proactively looking for other environments within the same organisation where merit might be given more weight. In addition, several participants mentioned engaging in more visible networking. As AVP-A explained, “I realised I need to ‘market’ myself internally, share my successes more openly, and build rapport with higher management. It does not guarantee anything, but it improves my odds in this environment.” Such strategies reflect a pragmatic approach in which individuals attempt to adapt to the circumstances even if the system remains unchanged. Others focused on maintaining a positive mindset. AVP-M mentioned, “I try to remind myself that one unfair outcome does not define my worth. I focus on improving myself, and I believe eventually merit will shine through, if not here, somewhere.” This self-reinforcement helps to protect their self-esteem, even when the external system appears unforgiving.

Additionally, a number of AVPs found comfort and practical advice in peer support. AVP-F noted, “We have informal peer mentorship. A group of us AVPs share our experiences; when someone is upset about a promotion decision, we talk it out and encourage each other. It helps to know you are not alone and to strategise together.” Such solidarity among colleagues reinforces that collective coping can be an effective response to pervasive organisational challenges.

Calls for Change:

Alongside coping mechanisms, AVPs were vocal about the need for structural changes to create a more equitable promotion system. They recommended that transparency in communication and clarity regarding promotion criteria are

essential. As AVP-E remarked, “If the management can lay out: here is what we look for in the next role and here is how the decision will be made—and then stick to it—it would remove a lot of anxiety and rumours.” This emphasis on transparency mirrors the critical role of procedural fairness discussed in Theme 2. Participants also underscored the importance of structured promotion committees to minimise bias. For instance, AVP-C stated, “Have multiple people weigh in—maybe the line manager, someone from HR, and a neutral department head. That way, it is not just one person pushing their favourite.” The suggestion to involve more stakeholders is seen as a method to dilute the effect of any one individual's potential bias. In addition, AVPs called for a cultural transformation led by top management. AVP-I emphasised, “The tone at the top matters. If CEOs and executives make it clear that nepotism won’t be tolerated and promotions must be earned, that will trickle down. It has to be enforced, maybe even audited.” This call for leadership accountability underscores a belief that change must start at the highest levels of decision-making and propagate throughout the organisation.

Furthermore, clear career development programs were proposed as a way to formalise the advancement process. AVP-L noted, “If the bank creates a pipeline, like a management development program, and those who excel in it get promoted, it would be clearer that it is based on skill. Right now, it feels ad hoc.” This recommendation emphasises the need for a defined pathway that rewards continuous improvement and measurable performance. Finally, addressing bias and ensuring inclusion—especially for women—was also raised. As AVP-N (female) observed, “Tradition also means sometimes women get passed over, maybe because there is an assumption, we will prioritise family or will not be ‘tough’ enough for senior roles. I would like to see more objective criteria to eliminate that bias.” This reflects a broader concern that non-meritocratic practices may inadvertently reinforce gender disparities, further highlighting the need for reform.

Theme 4 mirrors the pattern observed in Theme 3 by delineating both the emotional and behavioural responses of AVPs to unfair promotion practices and their constructive suggestions for change. The coping strategies—ranging from seeking other internal opportunities, engaging in strategic networking, and relying on peer support—demonstrate how AVPs manage their day-to-day work lives in an environment often perceived as unjust. At the same time, their calls for change, emphasising transparency, formalised procedures, top-

down accountability, structured career development, and increased inclusion, underscore a collective vision for a fairer, more merit-based promotion system. This dual approach of adapting to existing challenges while actively envisioning a path forward provides a comprehensive view of how AVPs navigate the tension between meritocracy and tradition in their organisations.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide a nuanced understanding of the tension between meritocracy and tradition in promotion practices within Karachi's private banks, as seen through the eyes of Assistant Vice Presidents. In this section, we interpret the results in light of the literature and theoretical frameworks, discuss the implications for organisational practice and theory, and outline the contributions and limitations of the study.

Interpreting Key Findings in Light of Literature

The narratives of the AVPs align with and enrich the existing literature on nepotism, favouritism, and organisational justice. Consistent with prior studies, our participants confirmed that favouritism and patronage are perceived to be present in their organisations. This echoes survey-based research indicating that a significant number of employees in Pakistan believe personal connections often outweigh merit in promotions (Zeeshan & Qazi, 2023). The vivid examples provided by AVPs, from overt nepotism (family ties influencing promotions) to subtle cronyism (being in the “good books” of seniors), give life to the statistical correlations found by Iqbal and Ahmad (2020) and Ahmed et al., (2024) that nepotism undermines morale and fairness. One interesting nuance was the role of seniority as a traditional criterion. While nepotism and favouritism involve unfair advantage to specific individuals, seniority-based promotions are sometimes seen as a culturally fair practice (rewarding loyalty and experience). However, even this can conflict with pure meritocracy. The literature on promotion systems (e.g., Menhas & Siddiqui, 2021) often debates performance versus seniority. Our findings suggest that there is mixed sentiment among Pakistani private bank AVPs: some respect seniority traditions. In contrast, others see them as outdated, especially if seniority trumps noticeable performance differences. This highlights that “tradition” in promotion is multifaceted, not just nepotism but also legacy notions of tenure-based rewards.

The perceptions of organisational justice among participants strongly support the established theory. When AVPs perceived promotion decisions as inconsistent or biased, they reported classic reactions associated with low distributive and procedural justice: feelings of resentment, reduced trust in the organisation, and contemplation of exit (Rasheed et al., 2025). This is directly in line with organisational justice theory, which links unfairness to outcomes like decreased commitment and higher turnover intentions. The live examples, such as AVP-L's admission of reducing discretionary effort after witnessing favouritism, vividly illustrate how injustice translates to lower organisational citizenship behaviours. The effect on morale and retention that emerged is a significant practical concern. Multiple AVPs indicated a willingness to leave if unfairness persisted, aligning with historical patterns of talent exodus due to biased promotion systems (Mehmood, 2025). Our study provides micro-level evidence for that macro-level observation: talented mid-career professionals are indeed contemplating emigration or job-switching in search of fairer opportunities. From an international perspective, similar trends have been observed in contexts where favouritism compromises merit-based progression. The theme of coping strategies and calls for change reflects a forward-looking perspective that complements existing recommendations. Participants' suggestions (e.g., transparency, structured committees, clear career paths) align with expert recommendations for mitigating nepotism. Their calls for change underscore that while the current system may be deeply entrenched, the desire for reform is strong. That organisational justice can be improved through deliberate, human-centric policy adjustments.

This research contributes by providing one of the few qualitative, in-depth studies on promotion practices in Pakistan's private banking sector from the perspective of AVPs. By capturing the lived experiences of mid-level managers, the study offers new insights into the interplay between formal meritocracy and entrenched traditional practices. The rich, direct narratives confirm quantitative findings from previous studies and shed light on adaptive coping strategies and practical reform suggestions. As such, the research bridges academic inquiry with actionable recommendations for enhancing fairness in HR practices.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study makes several notable theoretical contributions. First, it extends organisational justice theory by Colquitt (2001) by demonstrating that

Pakistani AVPs distinguish between benign traditions i.e., tenure-based seniority, and corrosive practices like nepotism. This finding suggests that justice models should treat these different form of “tradition” as separate cultural moderators, rather than aggregating them under a single umbrella of unfairness. Second, our results enrich ethical leadership theory by Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005) by showing that visible displays of leader integrity i.e., refusing to engage in “sifarish” significantly enhance employees’ perceptions of procedural fairness, whereas leaders who silently acquiesce to patronage undermine it. This exhibits ethical leadership as a critical boundary condition that transforms formal “policy meritocracy” into experienced, or “lived,” meritocracy. Third, we build on Schein’s organisational cultural model (Schein & Schein, 2017) by mapping how artefacts (formal HR manuals), espoused values (meritocracy), basic underlying assumptions (patronage norms) coexist in tension within a high-power-distance, collectivist context, illuminating these cultural layers align or clash.

From a practical standpoint, private banks and HR leaders can use these insights to narrow the gap between formal policy and day-to-day practice. Specially, institutions should establish cross-functional promotion committees with rotating membership and mandatory conflict-of-interest disclosures; publish KPI-based “readiness dashboards” six months before each promotion cycle to ensure transparency; link senior executives’ variable pay to fairness metrics i.e., post-promotion turnover and bias-audit scores; conduct bias-interruption workshops that train managers to identify and counteract preferential treatment; and formalise a two-year management development track complete with clear milestones and external mentors to anchor promotions in demonstrable skill rather than connections.

At the societal level, the adoption of fairer promotion systems promises to stem professional “brain drain” by providing high performers with compelling reasons to build long-term careers in Pakistan. It can also bolster public trust in private-sector institutions which are an essential asset in a country where Transparency International (2023) identifies favouritism as a leading corruption concern and advance workplace equity by showing transparent, data-driven processes can weaken gendered and ethnic biases embedded in traditional patronage networks. Collectively, these theoretical, practical, and societal implications position the research to inform and benefit a wide array of stakeholders.

Conclusion

This study offers a multi-layered portrait of how Karachi's Assistant Vice Presidents experience the collision between meritocracy and tradition. Based on AVPs' voices, we show that promotion systems in Pakistan's private banks operate along two parallel tracks: a formal, performance-oriented framework and an informal, relationship-driven reality. This duality erodes trust and fuels disengagement, even among high performers, yet it also reveals leverage points for change. Conceptually, our findings extend organisational justice theory to a non-Western, high-power-distance context, demonstrating that employees differentiate among types of tradition (e.g., benign seniority vs. corrosive nepotism) when judging fairness. Practically, the AVPS' narratives confirm that pockets of meritocracy already exist; these "bright spots" signal that cultural transformation is feasible when transparent processes, feedback loops, and ethical leadership converge. Conclusively, a promotion system that visibly links performance data, developmental milestones, and inclusive governance can reduce cynicism, strengthen retention, and better align human capital strategies with competitive market demands.

Table 2
In-Depth Recommendations

Strategic Focus	Action Steps	Expected Influence
Governance & Oversight	• Establish cross-functional promotion committees (line, HR, compliance) with rotating membership. • Require written rationales and conflict-of-interest disclosures for every promotion decision, subject to random audit by the Board Audit Committee or the regulator.	Increases procedural transparency; deters single-actor bias; signals zero tolerance for <i>sifarish</i> .
Data-Driven Merit Dashboards	• Deploy HR analytics dashboards that aggregate KPIs, 360° feedback, and behavioural competencies. • Provide each eligible manager with a personalised “readiness score” before promotion cycles.	Anchors decisions in verifiable metrics; offers employees a clear developmental roadmap; reduces rumour-driven morale loss.
Bias-Interrupting Processes	• Introduce anonymised first-round screening of promotion files (names and personal links masked). • Run annual bias audits to check gender, tenure, and network effects on promotion rates.	Surfaces systematic inequities; demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion; builds trust among under-represented groups.
Leadership Accountability & Culture	• Tie senior leaders’ bonuses to fairness metrics (e.g., meritorious to discretionary promotions ratio, post-promotion turnover). • Launch “Fair Leader” workshops emphasising ethical influence and coach-like sponsorship rather than patronage.	Embeds justice norms in leadership KPIs; reinforces cultural shift from patronage to performance.

Strategic Focus	Action Steps	Expected Influence
Structured Development Pathways	• Formalise a two-year Management Development Program with transparent entry criteria, rotational assignments, and milestone-based promotions. • Pair high-potential AVPs with certified mentors outside their reporting lines to prevent favouritism.	Clarifies advancement expectations; strengthens internal talent pipeline; reduces reliance on external hires.
Regulatory Industry Collaboration	& • Engage the State Bank of Pakistan and the Pakistan Banking Association to co-create a voluntary “Fair Promotion Seal.” • Benchmark against ASEAN and GCC banks implementing AI-assisted promotion algorithms to demonstrate regional best practices.	Raises industry-wide standards; provides reputational incentives; integrates local reform with global trends.

Limitations and Future Research

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs that follow promotion outcomes and justice perceptions before and after bias-interrupting interventions, allowing scholars to test causal effects rather than rely on cross-sectional snapshots. In parallel, investigations into algorithmic fairness in HR are warranted to determine whether AI-driven promotion tools, i.e., skill-pairing algorithms, truly neutralise patronage or simply cloak it in technological legitimacy. Studies should also apply intersectional lenses, analysing how gender, ethnicity, and regional background intersect with nepotism to shape individual career trajectories. Finally, cross-sector comparisons that contrast private-bank results with findings from state-owned banks and fintech firms can reveal sector-specific levers for reform. Weaving together these directions, future research can deepen our understanding of the meritocracy-tradition divide while offering a significant, evidence-based roadmap for building fairer promotion systems across emerging market contexts.

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Appendix: Interview Script (Semi-Structured Guide)

Introduction:

The interviewer greets the participant, introduces herself, explains the study's purpose—to explore AVPs' perspectives on promotion practices and organisational justice in private banks in Karachi—and reassures the participant of complete confidentiality. The interviewer then asks for consent to record the session.

Background Questions:

1. Can you please describe your background, including your education, work experience, and current role as an Assistant Vice President in your bank?

(Probe: What initially motivated you to pursue a career in banking and leadership?)

2. How did you progress to the AVP position, and what were the key factors or experiences that contributed to your promotion?

(Probe: Were there particular challenges or influential mentors along the way?)

Understanding Promotion Practices:

3. In your experience, what factors determine who gets promoted in your bank?

(Probe: How do performance metrics, qualifications, and other criteria compare with traditional factors like tenure or personal connections?)

4. Do you feel that the promotion process in your bank is fundamentally merit-based?

(Probe: Can you share any specific examples or situations where you observed either meritocracy or favoritism influencing a promotion decision?)

5. Have you witnessed or experienced instances where promotions were influenced by factors other than merit, such as personal relationships or favoritism?

(Probe: Please describe the situation and its influence on you and your team.)

Perceptions of Fairness and Organisational Justice:

6. Overall, how fair do you consider the promotion process in your organisation?

(Probe: What aspects of the process—such as transparency or consistency of decision-making—inform your view?)

7. How are the outcomes communicated to you?

(Probe: Is there sufficient feedback or explanation regarding why certain candidates are promoted while others are not?)

Personal Effect and Coping:

8. How have these promotion practices affected your own motivation, job satisfaction, or long-term career planning?

(Probe: Can you describe a time when a promotion decision had a significant personal effect on you?)

9. When faced with a promotion decision you perceived as unfair, how did you cope?

(Probe: Did you discuss your concerns with your manager, seek guidance from peers, or take any other specific action?)

Suggestions for Change:

10. What improvements or changes would you suggest to enhance the fairness and meritocracy of the promotion process in your bank?

(Probe: Are there specific policies or practices that you believe should be implemented or revised?)

11. In your view, what role should senior management or HR play in ensuring a merit-based promotion process?

(Probe: How can transparency and accountability be strengthened?)

Organisational Culture and Future Perspectives:

12. How do you believe the current promotion practices influence the overall organisational culture and morale at your bank?

(Probe: Has this had an impression on teamwork or employee loyalty?)

13. What are your hopes for the future regarding promotion practices within your organisation?

(Probe: Do you see potential for change, and what steps would be necessary to achieve a more transparent and fair system?)

Closing:

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with promotion practices or organisational fairness that we haven't discussed?

(The interviewer thanks the participant for her time and insights, reiterates the confidentiality of the responses, and formally closes the interview.)