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Factors of Perceived Organizational Politics: An Analysis of What Contributes the Most?

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Abstract

This study explores the contributions of four factors altogether from (1) individual, (2) dispositional, (3) organizational, and (4) job characteristics in organizational politics. A sample of college teachers ($n=423$) taken from Multan provided data on the measures of individual attributes, perceived organizational politics, Type-A behavior pattern, basic psychological needs at work, organizational structure, and job characteristics. The series of ordinary least squares regression model was employed to analyze the role played from four groups of factors. Results indicated that Findings revealed that age and job tenure from personal factors, Type-A behavior and need of autonomy from dispositional factors, centralization, formalization, and hierarchical level from organization factors, and skill variety, job autonomy, and feedback from job-related factors were found highly significant predictors of perceived organizational politics. Findings support the consideration of personal, dispositional, organizational, and job-related factors to perception of politics. These findings have the implications for institutes and organizations to derogate the political environment at workplace through providing skill variety, autonomy, feedback, and formalization.

Keywords: perception politics, need of autonomy, type-a behavior, centralization, skill variety.

1. Introduction

In the most recent decades, researchers and experts have shown their greater interest in understanding the employees' political behavior at workplace. Organizations are social substances often engaged in efforts for individual differences, assets, and a mixed bag of determined strategies executed that employees performed to achieve goals and advantages in distinctive manners (Molm, 1997). Though employees' political behavior can have both constructive and pessimistic results, a large portion of the exploration has centered upon "sullen side" of political practices (Ferris, & King, 1991), where organizational politics is

generally characterized as conduct deliberately intended to expand interests toward oneself (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989) and thusly repudiates corporate objectives of organization or the concerns of employees. This linear perspective postulates usually a negative representation of political environment at organizations in the perception of nearly all organizational workers. This kind of political behavior has a tendency to make a destructive and divisive work climate, diminishes hierarchical proficiency and viability, and has exceedingly damaging impacts upon laborers (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999).

Politics in organizations is the analysis of power in activity (Pfeffer, 1981). It was evidenced that when people were inquired to explain politics in organization, they usually named self-serving and manipulative activities particularly considered as negative impression (Gandz, & Murray, 1980). Researches mainly focused on this construct (e.g., Drory, 1937; Ferris, & Kacmar, 1992) noted that organizational politics is characterized by workers' self-serving actions to gain their personal objectives, benefits, and rewards at the cost of others and sometimes adverse to the concerns of the whole organization. Thus in turn, this kind practice was found mostly connected with aspersion, manipulation, disloyalty, and unlawful ways of over utilizing exponent to gain one's goals of interests. Here it could be drawn that politics is basically a purposeful influential way where one worker is primarily related with amplifying his self-investment either in the short-run or in the long haul. Nevertheless, political actions might or might not be really exhibit, the existence and non-existence of perceived politics is highly significant and critical (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001). Therefore the present study was designed to see the perceived organizational politics among college teachers.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Literature available on political activities at organizations has been generally centered on perception of politics in organizations due to Lewin's [Principles of Topological Psychology] recommendation (Lewin, 1936) that people follow up on their view of reality instead of exact reality (Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002). In fact, there is empirical evidence proposing that apparent the truth is the most vital element in deciding workers' beliefs and efforts (Breux, Munyon, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2009). Perceived organizational politics is explained by employees and managers as one's attribution of practices of self-serving (Ferris, Harrell-Cook, & Dulebohn, 2000).

Each worker at work unit may not interpret the same perspective of organizational politics; some employees may perceive it more while some of them may perceive it less instead of exact reality (Gandz, & Murray, 1980; Kacmar, & Ferris, 1991). Moreover, politics may not generally be seen as negative. In case of negative perception, it prompts fears of uncertain situations, low job fulfillment, and lack of confidence and assurance among the workers since they are not clear about what interpretation they will get against their activities, they are uncertain of their external happening and not clear how to respond (Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014). In most of the situations, perceived organizational politics cause a obstruction, and present a threatening alarm in that it restrict one employee confidence in their capability to accomplish individual and organizational objectives (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Lepine, Podsakoff, Lepine, 2005).

Given the solid confirmation interfacing view of perceived politics in organizations with a mixture of negative results for employees and managers, it is basically imperative for

organizations to address those components that lead to these perceptions (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). Ferris et al. (2002) have reported in their wide and extensive review of the studies analyzing perception of politics at workplace that the immense numbers of leading factors have been confirmed through empirical studies. Nonetheless, in the review documented by Ferris et al. (2002), a large number of factors had just been analyzed once in researches and about 50% of the factors inspected are explored two times in researches. Further, review by Ferris et al. (2002) also demonstrates discrepancies in results of several studies investigating same variables like organizational factors (i.e., centralization, formalization, hierarchical level, feedback and work autonomy), and individual factors (i.e., gender, age, job title, job experience, tenure, and personality trait in terms of locus of control). Other researches also mentioned these differences in the findings related to these variables (Adams, Treadway, & Stepina, 2008; Kacmar, & Baron, 1999).

Though currently there has been an extensive consideration upon literature of organizational behavior in relation to the contribution of dispositional and situational antecedents to perceived politics in organizations, very few studies (Davis-Blake, & Pfeffer, 1989; Davis-Blake, & Pfeffer, 1996) have explored situational components serve as the essential determinants of employees' behavior at working place, while other studies (House, Shane, & Herold, 1996; Shane, Herold, & House, 1996) have contended that dispositional factors affect and anticipate the shaping and establishment of beliefs and actions in organization. As earlier mentioned by Ferris et al.'s meta-analytical review (1989) on exploring the contributions of both situational and dispositional factors separately in developing perceived organizational politics, a little attention is needed to assess the exact constitution of different roles of dispositional traits and situational factors in the same model.

House, Shane, and Herold (1996) reported dispositions as “psychological rather than physical or other dispassionately evaluated qualities of people, personality attributes, motives, attitudes, and inclination”. Dispositions usually are defined as propensities to react to circumstances. This study concentrates on personality characteristics viewed as the most consistent people dispositions over time and situation (House et al. 1996).

Studies have since a long time ago contended that study of politics in organization is a widespread debate and therefore it calls for more consideration and empirical research (e.g., Gandz, & Murray. 1980; Pfeffer, 1981). Though the work of Ferris et al (1989) has portrayed the association between perceived organizational politics and its determinants and outcomes, the query of which precursors' group of perception of politics in organizations contributes more still remains unexplored. Therefore, the present research was planned to explore the factors of perception of organizational politics in the work environment. However, this study extends the previous studies by investigating dispositional factors such as type A-B personality trait and need for achievement that have not been explored in previous researches as antecedents to perceived organizational politics (Adams, et al. 2008). Type A/B behavior pattern as a personality trait refers to an individual responses towards the stressful events and challenging situations occurring in his/her everyday activities (Ivancevich, & Matteson, 1988). Type A behavior pattern is characterized by predisposition of achieving goals, highly aggressive, efficient, assertive, unfriendly, challenging and time oriented (Glazer, & Beehr, 2005). While Type B behavior pattern is characterized as relaxed, easygoing, and casual while performing their assigned tasks (Spector & O'Connel, 1994).

This study also focused the question of Vigoda (2003) who pointed out the query that which predictors' groups of perceived organizational politics is the most substantial to explain the development of perceived organizational politics. For this purpose in the present study, the variables which work as forerunners for perceived organizational politics were categorized in four groups including individual, dispositional, organizational, and job related factors. Following hypotheses were formulated:

- Perceived organizational politics will be related with employees' individual factors, dispositional factors, organizational factors, and job-related factors.
- Individual, dispositional, organizational, and job-related factors will predict the level of perceived organizational politics.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

A total of 423 college teachers from Multan participated in this study covering different age groups ranged 26-58 years, and across both gender; 202 males and 221 females. Convenient sampling technique was used to approach the participants in their colleges. First a letter emphasizing the volunteer nature of research and confidentiality of all responses provided from the researcher were given to the participants to outline the objectives and instructions. Then a booklet containing questionnaires along with variables details were administered to the volunteered sample.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Perceived Organizational Politics

A modified version of Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (Kacmar, & Carlson, 1997) originally developed by Kacmar and Ferris (Kacmar, & Ferris, 1991) was employed to measure the perceived organizational politics. It is 9-item scale with 5 rating options wherein 1 shows strongly disagree and 5 indicates strongly agree. A larger score is interpreted as greater perception of politics in organization and lower score is vice versa. Alpha reliability and content validity of the scale were found 0.71 and 0.76 respectively.

3.2.2 Antecedents of Perceived Organizational Politics

In this study the following four groups of antecedents of perceived organizational politics were categorized as;

Individual Factors: the study includes four individual variables; gender, age, job title, and job tenure. Participants provided information on their gender age, job title, and job tenure as listing in the questionnaire. These variables were codified. Gender was coded male as 0 and female as 1. Age was converted in months. Job title was coded lecturer as 1, assistant professor as 2, associate professor as 3, and full professor as 4. For job tenure, participants were asked "How long have you been serving in this institute?" and responses were converted in months.

Dispositional Factors: the study includes two dispositional factors; Type A personality and basic psychological needs at work. Type A/B personality was measured through Type A Behavior Pattern Scale (Anjum, & Khaliq, 1991). It has 12 items with two forced choice statements. Items scored as 1 represent the Type A and items scored as 0 represent Type B. Score 9-12 indicates Type A behavior, 0-4 indicates type B behavior pattern, and

score range of 5- 8 represents absence of both type A & B. Alpha reliability and content validity of the measure were found 0.67 and 0.63 respectively.

Basic psychological needs at work were measured through Basic Need Satisfaction at Work Scale (Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov, & Kornazheva, 2001). It has 21 items with 7-point rating scale measuring the three types of needs; need for autonomy measured with 7 items, need for competence assessed with 6 items, and need for relatedness measured with 8 items. Items are averaged out on each subscale after reverse scoring of the items identified with (R). The alpha reliability co-efficient of scale was 0.68 and content validity was found as 0.70.

Organizational Factors: the study includes three organizational variables; centralization, formalization, and hierarchical level. To measure these factors, Organizational Structure Preference Scale (McShane, & Von Gilnow, 2013) was used with slightly adaptation. This scale has 15 items with four options of response format rated within 0-3 wherein 0 indicates “Not at all” and 3 indicate “Very much”. Items are scored by adding scores on five items for each subscale.

Work-Related Factors: the study includes three job characteristics; skill variety, autonomy, and feedback as work-related factors. These antecedents were measured through job characteristics scale (Hackman, & Oldham, 1980) having five subscales: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. It has total 11 items responding on 7 options wherein 1 show strongly disagree and 7 shows strongly agree. In this study three subscales were used. To obtain a total score on every subscale, responses are added and then averaged on each respective scale. Some of the items are negatively stated and are scored reverse. Alpha reliability and content validity of the scale were found 0.76 and 0.73 respectively.

3.3 Procedure

Sample was drawn from a total population of 1200 college teachers in Multan city. Sample size was calculated online using www.surveysystem.com and a randomized sample of 423 college teachers was approached at different public colleges in Multan. After obtaining consent from participants, they were provided data on a booklet comprising measures of individual attributes, perceived organizational politics, Type-A behavior pattern, basic psychological needs at work, organizational structure, and job characteristics. All questionnaires were used with due permission granted from original authors. Confidentiality of the responses was assured to the teachers. Results were analyzed using ordinary least square regression analysis (OLS) through SPSS-21.

4. Results

To obtain an inter-correlation matrix among independent and dependents variables, zero-order correlation was computed (Table1). To measure the expected prediction of perceived organizational politics from personal, dispositional, organizational, and job related factors, a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was performed (Table2).

All assumptions of PLS were checked while computing analysis. All values were found in acceptable range. Normality of data was checked through skewness and kurtosis that was found 0.63 and 0.79 respectively. Linearity was checked through scatter plot that depicted linear relationship between independent and dependent variables. Condition Index was

found 16.37. Heteroscedasticity was observed by using Graph residual plot against Y and X. Moreover value of Durbin-Watson statistic (autocorrelation) was 1.54.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables

		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Individual factors																		
1	Gender	--	--	1														
2	Age	36.2	8.1	-.18	1													
3	Job Title	--	--	.22**	-.27**	1												
4	Job Tenure	15.6	9.98	-.07	.31**	-.38**	1											
Dispositional Factors																		
5	Type A Behavior	10.16	1.94	.32**	.12*	.05	.08	1										
6	Autonomy	27.63	6.42	.14*	.21**	.13*	.15*	.24**	1									
7	Competence	24.11	8.02	.28**	.11*	.24**	.45**	.13*	.09	1								
8	Relatedness	32.17	7.67	.24**	-.04	.03	.53**	.09	.11*	.03	1							
Organizational factors																		
9	Centralization	11.12	3.13	.04	.03	.12*	.06	.07	.18*	.13*	.17*	1						
10	Formalization	9.09	5.30	.02	.01	.05	.10*	.05	.07	.17*	.09	-.02	1					
11	Hierarchical Level	10.63	4.24	.02	.19*	.19*	.04	.18*	.19*	.15*	.16*	.62**	.04	1				
Job-related Factors																		
12	Skill Variety	6.56	3.28	.42**	.04	.04	.29**	.16*	.12*	.41**	.03	.04	.31**	.01	1			
13	Job Autonomy	5.71	3.75	.21**	.12**	.17*	.11*	.18*	.31**	.22**	-.04	.27**	.18*	-.12*	.38**	1		
14	Feedback	5.14	2.91	.12*	.03	.07	.33**	.13*	.19*	.32**	-.02	.25**	.28**	.17*	.29**	-.10	1	
15	Perceived Organizational Politics	39.35	3.61	.24**	.16*	.06	.21**	.53**	.39**	.21**	-.59**	.61**	-.33**	.64**	-.53**	-.44**	-.38**	1

*p>.05, **p>.001

Results in Table 1 indicate the means, SD, and inter-correlations among all study variables. Descriptive analyses showing the higher mean value ($M = 39.35$, $SD = 3.61$) for perceived organizational politics indicate that employees perceive greater politics in their organizations. Analysis from zero-order correlations shows the significant positive relationships of job tenure, Type A behavior, need for autonomy, centralization, and hierarchical level with perceived organizational politics, while perceived organizational politics was found negatively related with need for relatedness, formalization, and job characteristics of skill variety, autonomy, and feedback. However, job title and perception of politics in organization were found unrelated with each other.

Table 2: Regression Results for Prediction of Perceived Organizational Politics from Four Groups of Antecedents

Predictors	Predictors of Perceived Organizational Politics			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Personal Factors				
Gender	-.16*	-.11**	-.09	-.01
Age	-.28**	-.21**	-.16*	-.05
Job Title	.084	.051	.022	.004
Job Tenure	.31**	.26**	.17*	.11*
Dispositional Factors				
Type A Behavior		.27**	.21**	.19**
Autonomy		.19*	.14*	.10*
Competence		.14*	.09	.003
Relatedness		-.17*	.07	.001
Organizational Factors				
Centralization			.31**	.25**
Formalization			-.23**	-.17*
Hierarchical Level			.29**	.20**
Job-related Factors				
Skill Variety				-.13*
Job Autonomy				-.17*
Feedback				-.14*
R ²	.14*	.21**	.35**	.37**
Adjusted R ²	.13	.19	.34	.35
F-statistics	11.12**	16.14**	24.3**	17.24**
ΔR^2		.06	.19	.21

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Results from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses computed to test groups of factors in terms of individual, dispositional, organizational and job environment for perceived organizational politics. For this purpose the four groups of antecedents were

entered one by one into four models First group of individual factors were studied in Model 1. The Model 1 as a whole reported 14% of variance in POP. In Model 2, the second set of dispositional factors was analyzed. An increase of .21 in *R*-square was found that explained the 21% of variance in perceived organizational politics. Third set of organizational predictors was inserted in Model 3 that also described a significant quantity of variation in POP and reported 35% of variance in POP. Lastly, in Model 4, the fourth set of job characteristics factors was included. The model demonstrated also an increase in *R*-square of .37 and together explained the 37% of variance in POP.

5. Discussion

Keeping the theoretical framework suggesting that a collection of personal factors, job/work environment factors, and organizational factors altogether contribute in establishment of person's perceptions about politics at work place (Ferris, et al., 2002; Ferris et al., 1989), current study has empirically investigated salient roles of these antecedents. Although empirical exploration of the individual influences of perceived politics in organization have concentrated on demographic attributes like gender, age, ethnicity, job experience, and job position (e.g., Ferris, & King, 1991; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Kacmar et al., 1999; Ferris, & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris, et al., 2002; Ferris, et al. 2000), but with a renowned exclusion of O'Connor and Morrison (2001) and Valle and Perrewe (2000), research has neglected and overlooked the possible effects of behavior patterns on the development of perception of politics.

This study provided the evidences for the view that what group of influences is contributing in directing the way of perception of organizational politics among employees across a range of antecedents from personal, dispositional, organizational, and work-related determinants. Thus the current study hypothesized that perceived organizational politics will be related with employees' personal, dispositional, organizational and job factors. Results of inter-correlations supported the hypothesis and the study variables were found inter connected with each other. Demographic variables, personality characteristics, workplace structure, and job characteristics all were associated with perception of politics at work place. These findings are in tune with the results from several researches (Ferris, et al., 2000, Kacmar, & Ferris. 1991, Adams, Treadway, & Stepina, 2008, Kacmar, & Baron, 1999).

This study also hypothesized that perception of organizational politics will be influenced by individual, dispositional, and organizational factors as well as job designs. The study assumptions were tested by computing the analyses through hierarchical regression. The individual factors as control variable group were analyzed in first model of the regression, and then second set of dispositional variables was tested in model 2. In same way third and fourth model included the organizational and job factors respectively. The significant changes in "*R*" from model 2 to model 4 proposes that the group of independent variables presents a role in our capacity to explicate the change in the dependent variable of perceived organizational politics. Bodla and Danish (2011) also examined the relationship between perceived organizational politics and antisocial behavior and found that when people perceive the political environment at their work places they react aggressively.

Results pertaining to personal influences on perceived organizational politics showed that demographic variables of gender, age, job level, and job tenure have significant influences on formation of perception about political environment in organizations. However this

study reported interested findings that gender and job tenure are stronger contributors in perceived organizational politics as compared to age and job title. The findings from the work of Treadway, Adams, and Goodman (2005b) supported the present findings. They investigated the personal factors such as sex, age, and race as antecedents to the development of political environment within organizations. Though initially theoretical models have suggested that workers who are females, older, and have longer job experience are more likely to receive negative influences of politics within organizations that develop and shape their perception towards political nature of work environment. Thus they perceive the work climate as more political (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). This study has empirically supported this proposition.

Personality traits as significant determinants of development of organizational politics are also fundamentally important for organizations to consider in perception of politics (Lepine, Podsakoff, Lepine, 2005). Usually, personality attributes have been neglected in research of perceptions of organizational politics. Literature has demonstrated that personality dispositions may contribute in changing the perceived politics in organizations as compared to individual factors (Adams et al, 2008). This study has also provided evidences that dispositional factors account for perceived organizational politics than individual factors because personality traits of Type-A behavior and basic psychological needs satisfaction at work are significant determinants.

As for as the results related to organizational politics and job characteristics are concerned, findings suggested that organizational structure is a fundamental element in forming the perceptions of politics at workplace. In line with the theoretical models (e.g., Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Ferris, & Kacmar, 1992), this study focused on organizational factors such as centralization, formalization, and hierarchical level. It was found that centralization influenced perceived politics hence it might promote the perception of lacking control and greater degree of perceived politics directed to affecting central policy-makers. The findings are consistent with several researches (e.g., Andrews, & Kacmar, 2001; Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). Formalization was also found a leading factor to higher perception of politics due to less instructions and no clarity of rules and standards at work for employees. This finding confirmed the notion that organizations when have high level of formalization prone to create high role clarity that in turn reduces perceived politics (Ferris, & Kacmar, 1992). The study postulated one another significant finding for hierarchical level within the organization that is considered an antecedent to perceived politics at work place because political activities are generally interpreted as top level administrative functioning (Drory, 1993).

Job characteristics have always been remained in the attention of researchers because of its potential ability to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity in job design. This study included this family of factors at the last model 4 and expressed the significant power of these variables. Skill variety, job autonomy, and feedback directed the perception of politics. The findings are in accord with the perspective that the absence of sense of autonomy and skill variety fosters the perception among employees that they are under control of authorities, they are powerless, and they are working in political environment (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992).

One another important aspect of organization is leadership that may have the impact on development of perception of politics in any organization. Saleem (2015) has documented in his study investigating the impact of leadership styles on job satisfaction and mediating role of perceived organizational politics that transformational leadership provides sense of

honesty and fairness which create positive working environment. Members in an organization when felt secure and are fairly treated, their involvement in organizational politics and its negative impact decreases that leads to better productivity of an organization.

A profound meta-analysis examining the predictions proposed from factor model of perception of politics in organization is required and vital to cover the lacking of literature. Though several studies have been conducted on factors of organizational politics for quite some time, but surprisingly very little is explored about altogether factors of perception of politics. Therefore, an addition of meta-analytic integration to existing literature will address substantially more researches than Ferris et al's review of studies (2002). Moreover, hence a quantitative model of all existing empirical studies will present an exact estimation of effect size for each factor of perceived politics in organization. This estimate will also present the proportional effect of the various factors suggested in theoretical model such as individual factors, organizational influences, and work-related factors.

6. Conclusion

The study has made several contributions to the research stream on perceptions of politics. It has provided confirmation for existence of perceptions about organizational politics among employees. Further it has studied the combination of four groups of antecedents to perceived organizational politics to explain what factors contribute the most. This study examined dispositional factors including Type-a behavior pattern and basic psychological needs at work which were not addressed before. Findings indicated dispositional and organizational factors contribute the most than personal and job-related factors in formation of perceived organizational politics. Type-A behavior, need for autonomy, high degree of centralization, and low level of formalization were found to be the most significant factors among a family of determinants of perceived organizational politics.

7. Limitations & Suggestions

As the findings from this study are from a conveniently approached sample that was relatively small in size, this has evoked the limitation of generalizability and reliability of these findings. Hence exploring the phenomenon in detail for the first time in Pakistan, relatively smaller sample was drawn and was limited to one city only. Extension of study could be planned covering other cities of Pakistan to confirm further the theoretical model highlighted in the present study. Though study has included some new dispositional variables of Type-A behavior and psychological needs but there are still more to be explored such as achievement motivation, optimistic vs. pessimistic personality traits, and attributions. In spite of these limitations, this study should be considered first in Pakistan with enough power to combine all antecedents in one regression analyses. These findings imply that organizations should take some serious steps to minimize the perceived politics in organization and its harmful outcomes by increasing skill variety, autonomy, feedback, and formalization, and also by decreasing centralization and hierarchical level practiced in organizations.

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