

Perception of Organizational Politics, Job Satisfaction and Bio-Social Variables

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the nature of the perception of organizational politics and its relationship with job satisfaction and bio-social variables. Using a questionnaire, data was collected on 142 supervisory personnel. The results indicate that the perception of organizational politics consists of seven factor clusters. These are, impression management, clique behaviour, selection system, performance expectation, reward system, supervisory communication and co-worker behaviour. The results reconfirm the general finding of a negative relationship between job satisfaction and perception of organizational politics. Of the seven factors, impression management and supervisory communication contribute significantly to job satisfaction. While none of the bio-social variables showed any significant relationship with perception of organizational politics, on the whole, race, years of formal education and total years of experience showed significant differences/relationships with the factors of performance expectation, co-worker behaviour and supervisory communication. These results are explained with reference to the Malaysian context.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational politics is an area of much concern for employees and other stakeholders in the organization. Webber (1975) found that organizational politics was an essential part of organizational life. Managers who were proficient in "playing politics" were found to be more effective as they could more easily achieve personal and organizational goals. Similar conclusions have been reported by a number of other researchers (e.g., Grandz & Murray, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). In recognizing the importance of organizational politics in the area of effective career strategy, Shoonmaker (1971) has suggested a number of advancement tactics as proven political activities. He pointed out that high visibility, impression management, avoiding dead wood and interpersonal competence contributed greatly to career advancement.

Most of the studies have focused their attention on the organizational consequences of organizational politics. In his survey on the studies of organizational politics, Luthans (1992) viewed that the organizational environment which faces limited critical resources, high ambiguity, complexity and changeability

will bring about increasing political activities. Miles (1980) further emphasized that increased change will bring about increase in political manoeuvring.

Although organizational politics has been much discussed, it is often little understood. Burns (1961) has termed organizational politics basically as exploitative behaviour to secure and satisfy oneself. Porter (1976) described organizational politics as organizationally "unrequired" or "undesired". It is designed by individuals and/or sub-units for self-serving interest. Allen and Mayes (1977) viewed that it was the management of influence to achieve ends which were non-sanctioned. Vredenburg and Maurer (1984) have divided the definition of organizational politics into two broad categories. These are: activities of organizational members that affect the decision-making process; and self-serving behaviour that are organizationally non-sanctioned.

The bulk of the evidence has focused on attempting to understand organizational politics objectively. Little or no attempt has been made to study the subjective experience of organizational politics which perhaps constitutes a significant core and contributes greatly to the understanding of the concept

of organizational politics. After all people behave on the basis of their perception of reality and not on reality per se. Madison et al. (1980) are of the opinion that by studying the subject's perceptions of organizational politics, a more accurate description of the "world of everyday thought and experience" could be obtained. This is in spite of the argument that reliance on perceptual data may have attributions of self-serving biases and self-defensive interpretation of reality by respondents. Grandz and Murray (1980) have suggested that it is appropriate to understand organizational politics as a subjective experience (i.e., state of mind) rather than an exclusively objective state.

In a recent study, Ferris and Kacmer (1992) developed a 31-item instrument to measure the perception of organizational politics. Their analysis indicated that the perception of organizational politics has three dimensions: (1) supervisor's political behaviour, (2) co-worker and clique behaviour, and (3) organizational politics and practice. The present study is an attempt to further understand the concept of the perception of organizational politics (POP), particularly in the Malaysian context and examine its relationship with job satisfaction and bio-social variables. Available evidence suggests an inverse relationship between POP and job satisfaction and a positive relationship with age and years of work experience. Female employees perceive their work environment as more political than do their male counterpart (Ferris & Kacmer, 1992).

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was collected through a questionnaire containing statements measuring POP and job satisfaction.

Perception of Organizational Politics

Ferris and Kacmer (1992) subjected their 31 items to factor analysis with the Varimax Rotation. Items that had a factor loading of 0.5 and above were used for this study. These 22 items were given to 10 MBA students with an average of 6.7 years of work experience to examine their language and presentation particularly for a Malaysian sample. As a result

of this exercise, minor changes in the language were incorporated.

Job Satisfaction

Following the definition of job satisfaction as given by Locke (1976), 17 items were either developed or borrowed from the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. For an adequate measure of job satisfaction, Locke identified nine dimensions. These are: work itself, pay, promotion, recognition, benefit, working conditions, supervision, counselling, and company management. All seventeen items were given to the same group of MBA students to judge whether they reflected the dimensions and whether they were easy enough to be understood by Malaysian respondents. With minor changes in language, all 17 items were accepted.

Questionnaire items of both POP and job satisfaction sought responses on a 10cm line with anchor points identified as "strong agreement" and "strong disagreement". The unit of measurement was the distance in millimetres from the right anchor point in the case of items which are negatively worded, and from the left anchor point in the case of positively-worded items. This technique is adopted because it discourages non-committal responses on pre-determined scale points and also provides more and finer scale values for sophisticated statistical analysis. The scale values range from 0-100 mm.

The questionnaire also sought responses on such bio-social variables as age, gender, years of work experience in organization, years of work experience in present position, years of formal education and ethnic background.

A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, of which 142 were returned, indicating a 56.8% response rate. All respondents were in supervisory positions and represented four manufacturing firms situated in Bayan Lepas and the Prai Industrial Area.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the sample profile of 142 respondents. The sample consisted of mostly male respondents. The average age was 32.5 years. On an average they had 8.5 years of work experience of which about half the time

TABLE 1. Sample Profile

Variable		%	M	SD
Gender	Male	81.4		
	Female	18.6		
Race	Chinese	69.8		
	Malay	23.0		
	Indian	7.2		
Age			32.5	8.02
Exp. in Company			8.5	9.36
Exp. in present position			4.8	5.19
Years of formal education			14.6	3.07

M=Average; SD=Standard Deviation Estimate

was spent in the present position. The standard deviation estimates for these two experiences are higher than average, indicating a wide dispersion.

The sample had an average of little more than 14 years of formal education and the majority belong to the Chinese race.

To be able to conceptualize and investigate the nature of POP, the responses of 142 respondents on the 22 items were factor analysed. Factors were extracted using the principal component analysis and factor loading was determined by varimax rotation of the items. The analysis isolated 7 factors with eigenvalue more than 1, and 63.4% cumulative percentage accounting for variance in data. Most items showed a communality value of 0.5 and above. The items and the communality values are given in Appendix 1. The seven factors of POP along with item numbers and final statistics are given in Table 2. Items 3, 18 and 20 belong neither to any of the seven factors nor among themselves. Hence they are excluded from the analysis.

Before examining the relationship between job satisfaction and POP inter items, the correlation of coefficients among the 17 job satisfaction items were calculated. All items correlated significantly with each other

except one which was excluded from the final analysis. Scores on the rest of the items were added to get a single measure of job satisfaction.

Multiple regression analysis between job satisfaction and all the 7 factors of POP revealed an overall multiple R of 0.64 which was found to be significant beyond the conventional levels of significance (see Appendix 2). Since the beta value is negative, it signifies that job satisfaction decreases with increasing POP.

The R² explains a 42% variation in job satisfaction. The percentage of variation did not change or changed marginally when other factors were controlled. Exclusion of impression management (factor 1) and supervisory communication (factor 6) however accounted for the significant depression in R².

Table 3 presents the result of the relationship between bio-social variables and POP. Except for gender and race which have discrete categories, all other variables were correlated with POP. In the case of gender and race t-tests were calculated.

The results indicate that neither males as compared to females nor supervisors belonging to the Chinese as compared to those belonging to the Malay race differed in their

TABLE 2. Factors in Perception of Organizational Politics

Factor	Questionnaire Item	Eigenvalue	PCT VAR	CUM PCT
Impression Management	1,9,10,11	4.0	18.3	18.3
Clique Behaviour	4,13,16	3.0	13.5	31.8
Selection System	14,15	1.6	7.5	39.3
Performance Expectation	2,5,7	1.6	7.1	46.4
Reward System	6,17,22	1.4	6.4	52.7
Supervisory Communication	8,19	1.2	5.5	58.3
Co-Worker Behaviour	12,21	1.1	5.2	63.4

PCT VAR = Percentage Variance; CUM PCT = Cumulative Percentage

TABLE 3. Perception of Organizational Politics and Bio-Social Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	t/r values
Gender				
Male	114	47.6	13.80	
Female	25	46.3	12.70	0.65
Race*				
Chinese	96	48.4	13.31	
Malay	32	47.5	13.37	0.74
Age				0.07
Exp. in Company				-0.01
Exp. in Present Position				-0.03
Education				0.18

N = Number of Cases;M = Average;SD = Standard Deviation Estimate.

* : Because of small sample size Indians are not included in this analysis.

POP. Additionally, age, total years of experience, years in present position and years of formal education did not correlate with POP.

Subsequent analysis was carried out to examine if individual factors of POP showed any significant relationship with bio-social variables. Only significant results are presented below.

* Supervisors of Chinese origin perceived greater organizational politics ($M = 56.6$) than those of Malay origin ($M = 49.3$) on the factor of performance expectation ($t = 3.94$; $df = 124$; $p < .01$).

* Supervisors of Malay race perceived greater organizational politics ($M = 51.1$) than those of Chinese origin ($M = 42.0$) on the factor of co-worker behaviour ($t = 2.09$; $df = 124$; $P < .05$).

* The greater the years of formal education, the greater was the POP on supervisory communication ($r = 0.29$; $df = 116$; $P < .05$).

* The greater the total years of experience the lesser was the POP in co-worker behaviour ($r = -0.24$; $df = 116$; $P < .05$).

DISCUSSION

In an attempt to further examine the subjective nature of POP, the response of 142 supervisors were subjected to factor analysis. Seven factors with eigenvalue of one and above were found to explain 63.4% of the variance. These factors were obtained after an orthogonal rotation of the factor loading which grouped the items into factors uncorrelated with each other indicating thereby that the seven factors referred to discrete and distinct aspects of POP.

This finding is different from that of Ferris and Kacmer (1992) who found only 3 factors to be most interpretable, accounting for 45.1% of the variance. The variance accounted for the seven factors is significantly higher than the three-factor classification. While 3 of the factors identified in this study refer to more or less the same aspects as those of Ferris and Kacmer (clique behaviour, supervisory communication and co-worker behaviour) the other four (impression management,

selection system, performance expectation and reward system) add extra dimensions to our understanding of the nature of POP. It seems that POP is determined as a *post facto* realization of the choices made by employees in work situations in such areas as visibility, selection, performance and rewards that are non-satisfying to the perceiver. These choices are seen as politically motivated and therefore too subjective to stand the test of logic.

The results of this study further confirmed the general conclusion of an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and POP (Grandz and Murray, 1980). Job satisfaction, which is the end result of effort, creates a sense of well-being. Politically manoeuvred deprivation of appreciation and absence of recognition and reward for efforts, hurts the sense of well-being and contributes to low job satisfaction. More specifically, impression management and supervisory communication account for significant effects on job satisfaction.

While bio-social variables fail to show significant differences/relationship with POP as a whole, they do indicate significant results with individual factors of POP. The ethnic background of the respondent seems to make a difference in two factor-performance expectation and co-worker behaviour. While supervisors of Chinese extract experience greater POP on performance expectation, their POP is significantly lower on co-worker behaviour when compared to that of their Malay counterparts.

In the Malaysian context, where people of three different ethnic origins coexist, the labour force has often been described as a "minefield of multicultural sensitivities". The values held by different races may lead to differences in perception at the work place. In a study of ethnic values, Asma Abdullah (1992) identified 40, 24 and 14 values typical of Malay, Chinese and Indian races respectively. If 3-5 values which are common across the three races are dropped, on an average, Malay employees are characterized by respect for authority, humility, patience, loyalty, tolerance, compliance, obedience and courtesy (values which are more oriented towards non-confrontational social relationships). On the other hand, the Chinese seem to have

values that are oriented to success and practicality (e.g., wealth, perseverance, meritocracy, risk-taking, pragmatism and entrepreneurship). Given these differences in values, it is not surprising that on the factor of performance expectation, Chinese supervisors have higher POP when compared to their Malay counterparts and lower POP on the factor of co-worker behaviour. Performance expectation is top down and has a direct bearing on the values of success and practicality, while co-worker behaviour has greater meaning for non-confrontational social interactions.

The results indicate a positive relationship between education and POP for the factor of supervisory communication. Given greater exposure with increasing education, it is easier to decipher political overtones in supervisory communication no matter how minute they may be. This study also shows a negative relationship between years of experience and POP on the factor of co-worker behaviour. Increasing years of experience, and by implication, increasing years of togetherness promotes understanding of co-worker behaviour. The social proximity thus created becomes functionally useful in tolerating others and/or ignoring both intended and unintended political manoeuvring.

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