

Office Politics: The Reduction of Employees' Need for Power

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between need for power and personal attributes with the perception on office politics. It involved 130 government officers who are in grade 41 to 44 and serve in government agencies in Northern Region of Peninsular Malaysia. They are selected by using disproportionate stratified random sampling method. In measuring perception of office politics, this study has adopted Kachmar and Carlson's (1997) perception of politics measurement. In addition, personal attribute was measured by adopting Personal Attributes Questionnaire developed by Spence and Helmreich (in Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon and Sanford, 2006) and the researcher has utilized Needs Assessment Questionnaire (NAQ) constructed by Heckert, Cuneio, Hannah, Adams, Droste, Mueller, Wallis, Griffin and Roberts (1999) to measure need for power. Correlation and regression analyses results have exhibited that both factors of need for power, namely need for dominating and need for authority, have a significant negative relationships and effect on perceptions of politics. This result has carried evidence that when employees feel that politics become a dirty game in an office, they tend to reduce their need for dominating and need for authority in implementing their job. A dirty political game will reduce employees' motivation. Hence, they will just follow the instruction ordered by their superior without showing their creativity.

Key words: Office Politics, leaders' attributes, leaders' need for power

1. Introduction

Organizational politics or office politics is really about manipulating power and authority to build relationship to get things done. In other words, it is about "stabbing" people to achieve objectives. Organizational politics is the use of one's individual or assigned power within an employing organization for the purpose of obtaining advantages beyond one's legitimate authority. Those advantages may include access to tangible assets, or intangible benefits such as status or pseudo-authority that influences the behavior of others. Both individuals and groups may engage in organizational politics (Weissenberger, 2010). Organizational politics, sometimes referred to as office politics (which strictly only includes office workers, although the meaning is usually intended in the wider sense) is "the use of one's individual or assigned power within an employing organization for the purpose of obtaining advantages beyond one's legitimate authority (Parker, Dipboye, and Jackson, 1995). This definition is in line with the definition of office politics brought by Dhar (2009) where he defined office politics as the exercise of power to negotiate different interests amongst members while maintaining one's interests in certain organizational issues. Hence, in office politics game, conflict always exists due to power competition. This present study attempts to examine the relationship between leaders' attributes and need of power with organizational politics. Due to limited study on organizational politics was performed in Malaysian government agencies; this study will evaluate the relationship between understudied variables amongst officers in government agencies.

1.1 Problem Statement

Organizational politics is a major issue in today's organizational behavior because it involves individuals who manipulate their working relationships consumes time and resources for their own gain at the expense of the team or company. This situation causing problems for the individuals who work together, the end result can be far more devastating. Employees and managers who concentrate on the political aspects of work may have less time to pay attention their jobs. Study by Ferris and Kachmar (1992) has shown that perception of politics predicted job dissatisfaction among employees. This study has exhibited that negative influential between relationship with supervisor and organizational politics perception. Dhar (2009) has stated that organizational politics produced a threat on staff retention and work productivity.

In Malaysia, few cases that have been heard in Industrial Court were involving office politics. For example, in Ahmad Tajudin Ishak Vs Suruhanjaya Pelabuhan Pulau Pinang ([1997] 2 CLJ 225), the claimant claimed that his dismissal was in the basis of office politics where he argued that he has been discriminated. In the Pan Pacific Resort Pangkor Vs Raja Letchmi G Sundra Rajoo (Award 989 of 2008), the claimant has claimed that the General Manager has used his power to discredit her performance. In Dr Chandra Muzaffar Vs Universiti Malaya (Originating Summons No: R2-25-36-1999), the claimant has prosecuted that his contract was not renewed because of political reasons. As being exhibited by the judge in Puan Low Pak Chan Vs Hitachi High – Technologies IPC (M) Sdn. Bhd. (Award 1183 of 2009), that office politics may create employee's resistance, this study tends to examine the relationship between employees' need for power and their perceptions on organizational politics.

1.2 Significant of Study

Power competition and manipulation become the essence in office politics. Organizational politics has been discussed literary in 1970's with a focus on aspects of power and bureaucracy (Drory and Romm, 1988). The practice of organizational politics can have an even more serious effect on major business processes such as strategy formation, budget setting, performance management, and leadership. This occurs because when individuals are playing organizational politics, it interferes with the information flow of a company. Information can be distorted, misdirected, or suppressed, in order to manipulate a situation for short term personal gain. Besides causing problems for the individuals who work together, the end result can be far more devastating. Employees and managers who must concentrate on the political aspects of work may have less time to pay attention their jobs. This translates into financial loss which may in turn translate into job loss. Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson and Anthony (1999) exhibited that intent to turnover and job satisfactions were among the consequent outcomes from organizational politics. As most of the office political game occur in managerial level, thus, it becomes vital to study the relationship between leaders' attributes and need for power with office politics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organizational politics

It was indicated that in an organization, politicking activities in organization may create conflicts. The stress and social exchange perspectives are useful to understand reactions to perceptions of organizational politics (Chang Rosen, Levy, 2009). This is due to political behavior is a fact of life in organization and encompasses those activities that are not required as part of one's formal role in the organization. Factor analyses of data from an organizational climate survey performed by Parker, Dipboye and Jackson (1995) suggested that organizational politics is an important dimension of peoples' perception of the work environment.

As maintained by Chang Rosen, Levy (2009) perceptions of organizational politics had a stronger relationship with role conflict. The authors also revealed that perceptions of organizational politics have strong, positive relationship with strain and turnover intention and strong, negative relationships with job satisfaction and affective commitment. In particular, perceptions of organizational politics were associated with increased psychological strain, which associated directly with reduced performance, as well as indirectly with increased turnover intentions through reduce morale.

2.2 Personal attribute

Appropriate personal attributes amongst leader are important in managing their subordinates. By using Delphi method, a study on personal attributes needed by professionals has been conducted by Wakou, Keim and Williams (2003) listed seven important attributes ranked by professionals. These attributes were independent, strong ethic, bilingual, has persuasive ability, loyal, persistent and courageous. A study regarding affinities for personal attributes by Hartz, Watson and Noyes Jr. (2005) has found that a person's well-being is strongly influenced by the attributes of close associates such as family or close friends.

Spence and Helmreich (in Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon and Sanford, 2006) measuring personal attributes with three dimensions namely Masculinity (scale describe such traits as self-confidence and competitiveness), Femininity (scale items pertain to kindness and interpersonal warmth) and Masculinity-Femininity (scale has a mixture of masculinity and femininity). Studies regarding personal attributes have shown that in achieving particular objectives, individuals' personalities and their strategy to gain power will influence their attributes to control and influence other parties.

2.3 Need for power

The need of power is more associated with leaders. As mentioned by McClelland and Boyatzis (1982), need of achievement was associated with lower level workers, while leaders are more involve with need for power which associated with influencing others. Need for power refers to the ability to influence others, defeating an opponent or competitor, winning and arguing or attaining a position of greater authority (Yulk, 1989). McClelland (1970) has divided need for power into two dimensions which are socialized power and personal power. Socialized power (including influencing others for the sake of organizational goals) is the characteristic of effective manager. On the other hand, personal power portrays personal dominance or aggression (Harrel and Stahl, 1981). Therefore, in utilizing politics in organization, employees will utilize or manipulate their power to win the competition among themselves.

3. Research Methodology

This study is categorized as correlational study because it examined the relationship between leaders' attributes and need for power as independent variables with organizational politics as dependent variables. The total of 130 respondents has been selected by using proportionate stratified random sampling. Questionnaires were distributes to respondents to evaluate their perception on items that measured each variable. Instruments involved in this study were adopted from various sources. In measuring perception of politics (POPS), this study has adopted instrument constructed by Ferris and Kachmar (1994). Needs Assessment Questionnaire (NAQ) constructed by Heckert, Cuneio, Hannah, Adams, Droste, Mueller, Wallis, Griffin and Roberts (1999) have been used in examining need for power variable. This needs assessment tests explicit motivation that encompasses four type of motivation including need for achievement, need for affiliation, need for dominance (power) and need for autonomy.

According to this present study, only need for power items being considered to be used. To measure personal attribute, this study will adopt Personal Attributes Questionnaire developed by Spence and Helmreich (in Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon and Sanford, 2006). This measurement has three scale namely Masculinity (scale describe such traits as self-confidence and competitiveness), Femininity (scale items pertain to kindness and interpersonal warmth) and Masculinity-Femininity (scale has a mixture of masculinity and femininity). A pilot test is performed in order to examine the reliability of items consist in instruments used in this study. Table 1 indicates the Cronbach Alpha value for every variable.

Table 1: Reliability test results

Variables	Dimensions	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
Perception of Politics (POPS)	General Political Behavior Go ahead to get along Pay and promotion policies	15	.609
Need For Power	Need for authority Need for dominating	10	.728
Personal attribute	Masculinity Femininity Masculinity-Femininity	24	.787

According to Sekaran (2003) all variables are considered reliable as the Cronbach Alpha values are exceeding .60. Before pursuing further analysis, this study executing data screening which involved normality, linearity and outliers tests. For normality test, examination of skewness and kurtosis is performed where both values must score ± 1.96 . Scree plot test is executed in determining linearity and this study performed multivariate outlier for outlier identification. To identify dimensions of each variable involve in this study, factor analysis is carried out. Number of factor will be determined by eigenvalue where factor with eigenvalue is equal or greater than 1 will be accepted. In identifying the relationship between variables understudied, correlation analysis has been performed. In this analysis, the value of correlation coefficient (r) is examined. The value range for correlation coefficient is from -1 to +1, with +1 indicates a perfect positive relation, 0 indicates no relationship, and -1 indicates a perfect negative or reverse relationship (Hair, Jr, et. al, 1998). Meyers, et. al (2006) have categorized correlation coefficient value of .5, .3 and .1 as large, moderate and small.

4. Data Analysis

In data screening, the scree plots for all variables showing that they were linear. Normality test has exhibited that the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables falls within accepted value (± 1.96). To indicate outliers, this present study has performed multivariate outlier test where Mahalanobis Distance Value has been used. In this test, the value of chi squared ($\lambda = 18.467$) was referred. From this test, two cases have been eliminated from further analysis as these cases scored a λ value that greater than 18.467.

Factor analysis has been executed to determine total of dimensions consist in understudied variables of this study. Follow is the result from factor analysis by using varimax rotation.

Table 2 : Factor Analysis Result

Factor	Dimensions	KMO Value / Bartlett test	Reliability test (alpha value)
Perception of Politics (POPS)	POPS	.806 / .000	.834
Need for Power	Need for dominating Need for authority	.764 / .000	.734 .738
Personal Attribute	Femininity Masculinity	.778 / .000	.919 .768

4.1 The Effect of Need for Power and Personal Attribute on the Perceptions of Office Politics

In Correlation analysis has been performed in examining the relationship between variables understudied. Table 3 exhibits that only dimensions for need for power, namely, need for authority and need for dominating are significantly related with perception of politics at $p \leq 0.05$.

Table 3 : Correlation Analysis Result

Correlations		Need_for_authority	Need_for_dominating	Attribute_Female	Attribute_Male
Perception_of _politics	Pearson Correlation	-.298**	-.185**	-.056	.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.024	.578	.981
	N	128	128	128	128

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In examining the effect of need for power and employees' attribute on the perceptions of office politics, regression analysis has been executed. As what being determined by correlation analysis, in regression analysis, the result also showing that both dimensions for need for power, namely need for authority and need for dominate, were significantly and negatively influenced the perception of politics. Table 4 shows the result of regression analysis.

Table 4: Coefficients Table for Perceptions of Politics

	Dependent variable Usage (Standardized Beta)
Need_for_authority	-.354*
Need_for_dominant	-.232*
Attribute_Female	.020
Attribute_Male	.215
F value = F(8,92)	8.120*
R²	0.167
Adjusted R²	0.094
Durbin-Watson	2.114

* p<0.05

a Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Politics

5. Discussion and Conclusion

An organizational politics must be seen as a positive agenda where politics must be used by superior to gain power to influence and control subordinates to execute tasks ethically. Without politics (manipulation of power), officers cannot get a support from their employees in executing works. Therefore, organizational politics must be performed wisely in order to create a harmonious industrial relations environment and to eliminate worker's discrimination. Political game in organization may affect the performance of employees (Parker, Dipboye, Jackson, 1995; Robbins, 2001). Understanding the effect of organizational politics is essential to create the harmonious industrial relation in organization. Studies by Salem and David (2011) and Dhar (2011) have inculcate demographic factors such as gender and employment tenure in their study regarding organizational politics, thus, this present study extents the testing of educational level as one of demographic factor on the perception of organizational politics.

This present study involved government officers who are categorized as middle management officers because, as maintain by Drory (1993), employees in supervisory positions normally enjoy greater authority and autonomy, more formal power and greater opportunities to have influence on higher organizational levels. This present research involved 130 respondents from government agencies. 42 respondents or 40.78% experienced with office politics and majority of them hold a bachelor degree. Besides, all officers who hold master degree have experiencing office politics. This finding shows that level of education may influence the perception of politics in organization. Employees' perception on organizational politics will become higher as they have higher level of academic.

This is because the employees with higher education are alert and know about their employment rights and they will always demand for their rights being fulfilled. If they feel that they were treated with unjust treatment, they will feel that they were politically framed. Drory (1993) has concluded that the organizational politics often involve both winners and losers in a struggle for organizational advantages. It may bring benefit for some organization members, while being detrimental to others. This study has extracted need for authority and need for dominating as the dimensions for need for power. These dimensions were parallel with dimensions suggested by McClelland (1970) even though he has used different names.

According to him the two dimensions for need for power including socialized power (influencing others for the sake of organizational goals) which portray need for authorize and personal power (personal dominance) which defines need for dominating. Result from multiple regression analysis indicated that both dimensions of need for power were significantly affect the perception of politics at $p < 0.05$. The direction of this effect is negative.

This brings a meaning that when the officers feel that politics become the culture in managing works, they will reduce their authority and dominate power. They will reduce their trust with their superior and reaching the "at least the job done" objective. Meaning that, they will do as what been ordered by their superior without showing their full commitment in enhancing the quality of the tasks assigned to them. As maintained by McClelland and Burnham (1976), need for power determined high morale amongst leaders. Unfortunately, the existing of organizational politics will create negative behavior for example reducing the OCB (Parker, Dipboye and Jackson, 1995) and jeopardizing relationship (Chang, Rosen and Levy, 2009).

Hence, the first hypothesis is supported. The negative effect of need for power on the perceptions of politics will reduce the intention of officers in showing their talent in implementing tasks given to them which may reduce their performance that will direct to reducing their desire for promotion. This has been highlighted by Chang, Rosen and Levy (2009), perceptions of organizational politics were associated with increased psychological strain, which associated directly with reduced performance, as well as indirectly with increased turnover intentions through reduce morale. Sogra, Shahid and Najibullah (2009) concluded in their study on politics in performance appraisal that employees' job satisfaction and commitment will reduce when they feel that their performance appraisal was politicized and resulted a punishment. Hence, they suggest that supervisors must not manipulate their power in terms of managing subordinates.

The negative effect result of need for power on organizational politics is in line with the previous studies. Drory (1993) exhibited that the perception of political climate enhancing employees' negative attitudes; Ehigie, Kolade and Afolabi (2006) have found that need for power has a negative relationship with leaders' concern with citizenship well being; and Parker, Dipboye and Jackson (1995) listed the negative behaviors that may shown by employees in political environment such as having lower overall satisfaction, believing that the organization does not value high work standards, challenging work and integrity, evaluating senior management as ineffective, perceiving that the organization does not support innovation and believing that employees are not loyal to the organization.

The result from this study showed that when employees perceived that office politics occurring in their organization, they will reduce their power and they will just follow the direction made by their superior. This phenomenon will direct to reduction of creativity and innovative thinking amongst employees (Dhar, 2009). In organizational politics, manipulation of power is exercised where parties will compete for power by playing the politicking game. To those who don't have good tactics will lost the game and may be jeopardizing his position in organization. Hence, he might be discriminated. This situation will reduce employees' motivation and morale (Chang, Rosen and Levy, 2009).

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