

Examining the Effects of Emotional Intelligence on the Relationship between Organizational Politics and Job Performance

Dr. Sarminah Samad

Associate Professor

Faculty of Business Management

Universiti Teknologi MARA

Shah Alam 40450, Selangor Malaysia

Email: sarminasamad@hotmail.com, Tel:006055444668

Abstract

This paper presents a study which determined the relationship between organizational politics (OP) and its components with job performance (JP). The components of OP are general political behavior (GPB); going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP). Consequently the study investigated the most prevailing aspect of OP that influenced JP. The study also examined the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in moderating the relationship between OP and JP. The multistage random sampling consisted of 349 civil service staff were selected in Malaysian public organizations. The results revealed that the overall OP and its components were related negatively to job performance. The GATGA aspect of OP emerged as the most prevailing factor that influenced JP. Meanwhile the study found that EI despite of its positive and significant relationship with JP, however it did not moderate the OP and JP relationship. Findings and implications for managerial practices from the study are discussed and put forward.

Key words: Organizational politics, emotional intelligence and job performance

1. Introduction

Work environments have gone through inevitable evolution witnessing a number of monumental transformations. Operations are now conducted in revolutionized ways that were unbeknownst before. In the current ever-dynamic marketplace, organizations are faced with continuous challenges ranging from hard (like technological) to soft (like behavioral) in nature. Negative behaviors will ultimately result in reduced job performance, moreover if they are linked with unhealthy elements such as organizational politics. This scenario is without exception in Malaysia. In pursuit of economic expansion and to enhance the socio-economic condition of the citizens, the civil service staff in Malaysian public sector is left with no other option but to gain competitive advantage by ameliorating its efficiency. In tandem with that goal, these civil servants need to manifest high job performance by acquiring the right values, behaviors and emotions. However, this can be threatened by the presence of factors such as OP that have proven to be detrimental to the organizations (Conner, 2006). The questions are: what is the relationship between OP and JP. What is the most prevailing aspect of OP that influences JP? Whether the relationship between OP and JP could be buffered by other variable such as EI? This study attempted to answer those unanswered questions among civil servants in Malaysian public organizations.

2. Literature Review

Organizational politics (OP) has been one of the popular subject in industrial or organizational psychology due to its impacts on organizational outcomes such as job dissatisfaction (Poon, 2004), turnover intent (Harris et al., 2005), disloyalty, lowered perceived innovation (Parker et al., 1995) as well as lowered job performance (Byrne, 2005). However, it was not until the last twenty years that OP is discussed in earnest in the literature despite the rampancy of OP in the organizational settings. In addition researchers have suggested that further investigation to be conducted on the antecedents of job performance (JP) especially relating to behavioral aspects such as organizational politics (Rosen et al., 2006). Due to this scenario it is very important to embark a study on the impact of OP on behavioral outcomes such as JP. Organizational scientists have offered various (yet relatively coherent) definitions of organizational politics. In the early works like Allen et al. (1979), OP is defined as intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self interest of individuals or groups.

Pettigrew (1973) defined OP as the use of power to influence decision making, while Pfeffer (1981), as cited in Cobb (1986) describes OP as how power is used to resolve uncertainty and or dissention regarding organizational actions and objectives. In spite of various definitions Kacmar and Carlson (1997) concluded that OP definitions share few aspects in common: (a) political activities are a means of exercising social influence; (b) political behaviors are designed to promote or protect one's self interests and (c) at least two parties with the potential to possess different interests must be involved. This study used the definition given by Cropanzano et al., (1995), which defined OP as social influence to those who can provide rewards that will help promote or protect the self-interests of the actor(s). This definition is also shared by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) and Harris et al. (2005).

Much of the scholarly research in the field of organizational theory is originated in a quest to understand the antecedents and effects of organizational politics on individual productivity and job performance in workplace. However, despite the abundance of OP-related research in the literature, the results are still far from generalizable due to the settings of the studies (Parker et al., 1995; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). This, together with the pervasiveness and effects of OP in the workplace, makes further investigation still necessary (Poon, 2003). Amongst the studies done in the domain of perceived OP, its linkage with work outcomes such as job performance has drawn the interests of few researchers (Aryee et al., 2004; Byrne, 2005; Chen and Fang, 2007; and Zivnuska et al., 2004). In the same vein, this paper attempted to examine the relationship between OP and JP and determined which of the OP's component contributes most to job performance. Furthermore, to date there are limited studies regarding OP done in Malaysia and none of them have attempted to test the relationship between POP and job performance among civil servants. On top of that, researching the relationship between OP and job performance is deemed crucial as JP will directly impact organizational performance (Parker, 2007).

Tischler et al. (2002) state that, in the emerging body of literature, some behavioral aspects and individual feelings such as employee intelligence (EI) needs amongst human beings at work are often evident but the needs are often unfulfilled. They further emphasize that the behavioral aspects at work is, for the most part, failed to be recognized by organizations and leaving this dimension up to the individual worker. Emotional intelligence (EI), according to Goleman (1995), involves managing and knowing one's emotions, empathizing with others and maintaining satisfying relationships. In other words, an emotionally intelligent person manages to blend three components of emotion (cognitive, physiological and behavioral) successfully in any institution (Huffman et al., 2000). Gardner and Stough (2002) believe that the popularity of EI is rooted primarily from the suggestion that it underpins multitude aspects of performance and success that are not accounted for by other psychological constructs (such as intelligence and personality). Hence, given the potential of EI on the fact that they could moderate the relationship between perceived OP and job performance, this study explored the role of EI on the relationship between perceptions of OP and JP.

2.1 Organizational Politics and Job Performance

Definition of job performance as a variable in empirical research and its acclaimed relevance in the field of industrial or organizational psychology (Sonnetag and Frese, 2002) differs across researchers. Viswesvaran (2001) attributes this dissimilarity to the characteristic of it being an abstract and latent construct with many manifestations – a notion supported by Motowidlo (2003). This study however focused the definition of JP based on two dimensions mainly task performance (TP) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). TP as defined by Borman and Motowidlo (1997) has as many as five dimensions, being 1) job-specific task proficiency, 2) non-job-specific task proficiency, 3) written and oral communication proficiency, 4) supervision – in the case of a supervisory or leadership position, and partly 5) management.

In contrast to TP, voluntary behaviors that are deviant and damaging to the organizational goals are also deemed as a part of performance, but as a negative form of it (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; O'Brien and Allen, 2008). Such dysfunctional behaviors are generally labeled as counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). CWB refers to actions that adversely affect the well-being of the organization (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). Deriving from the above notions the measures of JP in this study is based on the combination of both TP and CWB constructs. Rotundo and Sackett (2002) assert that organizational performance is a result of accumulated individual performances. Hence, high organizational performance implies high level of job performance from each of its employees and vice versa. Job performance, on the other hand, has been proven to be affected by multitude of factors. Among these factors is OP, whereby empirical studies found that OP has negatively affects job performance (Kacmar et al., 1999; Ferris et al., 2002; Rosen et al., 2006).

This simply means that the higher the level of OP will result in lower level of job performance, and thus the lower the level of OP will mean the higher job performance magnitude. Therefore, it is hypothesized that OP will be negatively related to JP.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence, Organizational Politics and Job performance

Past studies have indicated that job performance can benefit from high level of positive values and emotional intelligence (Tischler et al., 2002; Sosik and Megerian, 1999). This has attracted industrial or organizational scientists to conduct further investigation to explore the potential of both constructs. Due to the impossibility of removing OP in totality from an organization, Byrne (2005) maintain that the critical issue is how the negative consequences of OP such as on JP could be buffered by other variables. Studies have indicated that the ability of EI in allaying the impact of dysfunctional factors on job performance. But the role of EI in moderating the relationship between OP and job performance is still unclear as little studies has been carried out to answer that question. This study therefore attempted to unravel the above issue.

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has been around for more than a century when several articles were published on the importance of emotional expression in survival (Norah et al., 2006; Cherniss, 2004). EI owes its current state of popularity, as many researchers believe, to the book 'Emotional Intelligence' by Goleman which was published in 1995 had sparked exponential-like growth of EI research. The potential of EI in buffering the impact of OP and its outcomes such as JP has been advocated by Poon (2003), whereby she suggested future OP-related studies need to be explored on this construct. She suggested that people with higher EI might take OP as less stressful than their lower EI counterparts. She further proposed that even if they deem EI as stressful, people with higher EI have emotional maturity that enables them to cope and deal with it wisely. This study therefore attempted to examine as well the effect of EI on the relationship between OP and JP. It is hypothesized that EI will serve as moderator on the organizational politics and job performance relationship.

3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to empirically examine the relationship between organizational politics and its components or dimensions with job performance (JP). It also examined the moderating effect of emotional intelligence (EI) on the relationship between OP and JP among civil servant in Malaysia. Consequently this study sought to test the following hypotheses:

- H1: There is a negative and significant relationship between OP component of general political behavior (GPB) and job performance;
- H2: There is a negative and significant relationship between OP component of going along to get ahead (GATGA) and job performance;
- H3: There is a negative and significant relationship between OP component of pay and promotion policies (PPP) and job performance;
- H4: There is a negative and significant relationship between overall organizational politics (OP) and job performance;
- H5: Going along to get ahead (GATGA) aspect of OP is the most important or prevailing predictor to job performance and
- H6: Emotional intelligence (EI) will moderate the relationship between OP and Job performance.

4. Methodology

4.1 Sampling Procedure

Data for this study were collected based on multistage random sampling from 349 government civil servants in Malaysian public organizations. The response rate was 69.8% from the sample of 500 staff. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test and answer the hypotheses and objectives of the study. The self-administered questionnaires obtained were then analyzed using SPSS (Special Package for Social Sciences) version 16. Factor analysis was conducted on OP scale to compare the dimensionality of this scale in this sample with the one proposed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). From the preliminary analysis, it was found that the subjects to items ratio for this variable in the study were correlated with other item at least 0.5 or more in magnitude value and within the acceptable magnitude value.

4.2 Measures

4.2.1 Independent Variables

The independent variables of this study were organizational politics (overall OP) and its components or dimensions of general political behavior (GPB); going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP). The levels of organizational politics perceived by the respondents in this study were gauged using measurement developed by Kacmar and Carlson's (1997). The Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) was used to measure OP which contains 15 items and can be divided into three components mainly GPB (two items); GATGA (seven items); and PPP (six items). The items of this scale were measured using five-point Likert scale (with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)

4.2.2 Dependent Variable

Job performance (JP) was measured based on the combination of two components of task performance and counterproductive work behavior. The seven-item measures of task performance was adopted from Williams and Anderson's (1991) based on the scale of 1 = never, 2 = hardly ever, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often. Meanwhile counterproductive work behaviors questionnaire developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was adopted in the study. Respondents were given a seven-point Likert scale of (1 = never, 2 = once a year, 3 = twice a year, 4 = several times a year, 5 = monthly, 6 = weekly, 7 = daily) to rate their response for each item. Results were then summed to arrive at a summary indicator of an employee's job performance. Higher mean scores are indicative of greater job performance.

4.2.3 Moderating Variable

The moderating variable in this study was emotional intelligence and was measured based on Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) developed by Schutte et al. (1998). The EIS 33-item self-report measure were measured using five-point Likert scale (with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Respondents' Profile

Majority (68.2%) of the respondents are married and nearly one-third (30.4%) of respondents are single. Female made up 59.6% of the sample while 40.4% are male. The youngest respondent is 21 years old (one person) while the oldest of them are 56 years (four people). The age group that has the highest percentage is 30 – 39 years old with 37.8%, followed by below 30 years (34.9%). Slightly more than half of the respondents (52.4%) have Bachelor's Degree as their highest level of academic qualification and 27.8% have at least obtained a Masters' Degree.

5.2 Relationship between GPB, GATGA, PPP and overall OP with JP (H1, H2, H3 and H4)

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations and alpha reliabilities of the variable measures in this study. The reliability analysis reveals that all scales are at the acceptable magnitude value of more than 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The coefficients value shown in Table 1 found that all of the hypothesized relationships were supported. Specifically the H1 which stated that general political behavior (GPB) would be negatively related to JP (job performance) is supported (beta = -.25. $p < 0.01$). This is followed by variables of going along to get ahead (GATGA), pay and promotion policies (PPP) and overall OP indicated a negative and significant relationship with JP. The coefficient values of the variables are: GATGA (beta = -.33. $p < 0.01$); PPP (beta = -.25. $p < 0.01$); and for overall OP (beta = -.38. $p < 0.01$). The data provided support for the hypothesis H1, H2, H3 and H4, therefore these hypotheses are accepted.

Table1. Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities and correlations of the study

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2.75	0.61	(.89)					
2	2.52	0.93	0.25**	(.73)				
3	3.81	0.75	0.35**	0.54**	(.84)			
4	2.32	0.70	0.18**	0.48**	0.29**	(.86)		
5	3.76	0.34	-0.15**	-0.06	-0.02	-0.26**	(.89)	
6	3.53	0.62	-0.38**	-0.25**	-0.33**	-0.25**	0.29**	(.84)

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, (Alpha reliability values are shown in parenthesis on the diagonal).

1 = Overall OP; 2 = General political behavior; 3 = Going along to get ahead; 4 = Pay & promotion policies; 5 = Emotional intelligence; 6 = job performance

5.3 The Most Important Factor that Influenced Job Satisfaction JP (H5)

Multiple regression analysis (Table 2) was employed to answer the fifth hypothesis in this study. The hypothesis was to test the most prevailing or important component of OP that contributed significantly to JP. Prior to interpreting the results an inspection was carried out to detect the multicollinearity of the data. From the inter-item correlation results (as provided in Table 1), it can be seen that the correlations among general political behavior (GPB), going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP) are acceptable as they are less than .70 and within the acceptable value (Pallant, 2001). Based on the multiple regression analysis of OP components for job performance, it was found that only GATGA and PPP were found to be statistically significant contributor to the equation as their beta values stand at $p < .05$. Meanwhile the beta value of GPB is larger than .05 as illustrated in Table 2 indicated of no significant contribution to JP. As the beta coefficient of GATGA (-.263) is larger than PPP's (-.127), it means that GATGA contributed most significantly to the job performance equation. The data proved that the H5 of the study is supported. This means that GATGA emerged as the strongest and unique contribution in explaining JP. This implied that GATGA is the most prevailing component of OP that influenced JP.

Table2. Multiple Regression Analysis of GPB, GATGA and PPP on Job performance

Predictor	Job Performance (Std Beta)
GPB	-.054
GATGA	-.263***
PPP	-.127***
R ²	.185***
ΔR ²	.129***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

GPB = general political behavior

GATGA = going along to get ahead

PPP = pay and promotion policies

5.4 Effect of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on OP and JP Relationship (H6)

Table 3 shows the results of hierarchical regression analysis.

Table3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis: the effect of EI on the Relationship Between OP and JP

Predictor	Step 1 Std Beta	Step 2 Std Beta	Step 3 Std Beta
Step 1: Model Variable			
Organizational politics	-.359***	-.324***	-1.210*
Step 2: Moderating Variable			
Emotional Intelligence		.227***	-.118
Step 3: Interaction Terms			
OP x EI			.906
R ²	.167	.217	.223
Adjusted R ²	.158	.206	.209
ΔR ²	.128	.050	.006
Sig. F Change	.000	.000	.135

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

This analysis was employed to test the sixth hypothesis of the study that emotional intelligence (EI) will moderate the relationship between OP (overall) and JP.

In other word the hierarchical regression analysis is to examine whether EI will affect the relationship between OP and JP, such that increases in EI in concert with increases in overall OP and will increase JP, whereas low contribution of EI will produce a decline in JP as overall OP increases. The results indicate that the interaction between organizational politics and emotional intelligence did not significantly increase the variance explained by the predictors as the p-value for the F-statistics is more than .05. The beta value for the interaction term is .906 at $p > .05$, which is also statistically insignificant. This data does not provide support for the hypothesis H6. Thus, Hypothesis H6 was not accepted.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between OP components of general political behavior (GPB); going along to get ahead (GATGA); and pay and promotion policies (PPP) and overall OP with JP. Consequently it examined the most prevailing factor that influenced JP and the moderating effects of EI on the relationship between OP and JP. The study found that all components of OP mainly GPB, GATGA, PP and overall OP were negatively and significantly related to JP. These results were consistent with previous studies (Aryee et al., 2004; Byrne, 2005; Chen and Fang, 2007; Zivnuska et al., 2004), therefore provide further evidence that OP has direct influences on the job performance of civil servants in Malaysia. As such, leaders in the civil service must recognize that organizational politics will subsequently harm the organization. Hence, measures must be taken to minimize perceptions of OP amongst the civil servants such as by providing clear and accurate performance assessments, empowering subordinates where possible, promoting workplace openness and fostering appropriate freedom of ideas. At macro level, effective communication must be adopted to minimize misinterpretations and adverse perceptions among employees.

As predicted the study found that the GATGA component of OP has the highest contribution in explaining the variations of JP and emerged as the most prevailing factor to JP. This finding implied that more efforts should be directed at minimizing the GATGA component of OP if the organization aims at promoting JP. This finding suggests that management should not take lightly the GATGA aspect as it would influence JP in workplace. The results from the study however did not support the hypothesis H6 that EI will moderate the OP and JP relationship. This might indicate the intervention of other extraneous factors that are not encapsulated in this study. Although EI did not affect the relationship between OP and JP in this study, however, the impact of EI on job performance should not be neglected. The regression analysis indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between EI and JP. The correlation analysis also revealed that was a significant and positive relationship between EI and JP. This finding suggests that EI is one of the important factors that can be linked to JP and the construct would have a direct impact on job performance. Hence, EI could be considered as one of the potential variables to be integrated in OP studies or model and to be applied in management practices with improvements in the construct.

The results of this study have shown a remarkable leading factor in assessing the OP outcomes of civil servants in Malaysia. Since the study was conducted in public sector and based on cross sectional nature of study the external validity of the results may be somewhat limited. The study proposes that future research should consider experimental or longitudinal approach and other consideration in terms of subject and setting of the study. A longitudinal approach may help in improving one's ability to make causal statements. Factor such as organizational, personal, occupational and cultural elements apart from employee emotional intelligence that may influence OP should be explored for further research. However, this study serves as a departure for future studies of OP as it is an initiative towards a greater understanding of organizational attitudes and behaviors particularly on organizational politics and job performance in the global business.

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Acknowledgments

This author duly acknowledges Shahrul Amri Abdul Wahab for the data and information contributed in the article. I must heartily remember the immense contributions received from him in this article.