

Office Politics as an Element in Office Ecosystem

Daud, Z^{*}

School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

Saiful Azizi Ismail

School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

Rashdan, M.S

School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

Husin, M.F

School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

Abstract

This study has examined descriptively the difference in gender and level of designation regarding the perception on office politics. It involved 103 government officers who are in grade 41 to 52 and serve in government agencies in Northern Region of Peninsular Malaysia. They are selected by using proportionate stratified random sampling method. In measuring perception of office politics (POPS), this study has adopted (Kachmar and Carlsan, 1997) perception of politics measurement. A t-test and ANOVA have been performed to test the different of POPS between gender and levels of designation. The results showed that there were no differences on office politics perception amongst respondents regardless their gender or levels of designation. This result has carried evidences that office politics become a general phenomenon where all employees will have the same opinion on the nature and results from political game in organization.

Keywords: Industrial relation; Office ecosystem; Perception of office politics; Gender; Level of designation.



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1.Introduction

Malaysia's Industrial Harmony Code of Conduct 1975 urged all organizations to sustain conducive and harmonize working environment in the relationship between employees or trade union of employees and employer. Article 1 of the Code mentioned that "*As employers and workers and trade unions representing them are jointly and severally responsible for good industrial relations*". The employees' movement, culture, value and communication amongst individual in an organization creates a unique ecosystem. Ecosystem is a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. Hence, the movement, communication between employees, culture and value of employees in an organization will create office ecosystem. Office ecosystem creates issues that always being discussed in industrial relation, a discipline that elaborates the relationship between employees and their employer in a workplace. Issues like discrimination, power abuse, fairness and contract violation always create dispute and grievance in an organization. These issues sometimes are referring to office politics.

Political game in an office may create bad office ecosystem. Office politics is referring to activities that portraying manipulating power and abusing power and authority to build relationship to get things done or to achieve one's personal objective. In other words, it is about "stabbing" or bullying people to achieve one's personal objectives. 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 *et al.*, 1995). Those advantages may include access to tangible assets, or intangible benefits such as status or pseudo-authority that influences the behavior of others. Both individual and group may engage with office politics (Weissenberger, 2010). 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 difference on office politics perception amongst respondents according to their gender and designation. This study involved officers in federal government agencies (Grade 41-52) in Wisma Persekutuan Anak Bukit, Kedah, Malaysia.

1.1. Problem Statement

Office politics is a major issue in today's organizational behavior because it involves individuals who manipulate their working relationships to discriminate other employee and competing to gain resources for their own gain at the expense of the team or company. This situation causing problems for the individuals who work together and 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 to their jobs. Study by Ferris and Kacmar (1992) has shown that perception of politics predicted reduction in job dissatisfaction among employees. This study has exhibited negative influential in the relationship between employees and supervisor when they perceived that their supervisor playing political game in managing employees. In addition, Dhar (2009) has stated that organizational politics produced a threat on staff retention and work productivity.

In Malaysia, few cases that have been referred to Industrial Court that 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 the case of Puan Low Pak Chan Vs Hitachi High – Technologies IPC (M) Sdn. Bhd. (Award 1183 of 2009), office politics may create employee's resistance. According to cases mentioned above, in Malaysia, regardless the type of gender, male and female employees may have experiences in office politics. It is important to proof that even though many literatures indicated that female workers always being discriminated by office politics, but, male workers may also experience the same problem. In addition, according to court cases presented above, most of office politics cases involve employees in managerial position.

1.2. Significant of Study

A harmonize working environment will create happiness in an organization that will direct to positive organizational citizenship behavior (Staw *et al.*, 1994). Power competition and manipulation which are the essence in office politics may create demoralizing and frustration amongst employees. Office politics has been discussed literary in 1970's with a focus on aspects of power and bureaucracy (Drory and Romm, 1988). The practice of office 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 office 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.

Employees and managers who always concentrate on playing politics in the office may have less time to pay attention with their jobs. They will always be worrying about other's performance and career until they forget about their true job responsibility. Hence, the organizational performance will be affected. This translates into financial loss which may in turn translate into job loss. Kacmar *et al.* (1999) exhibited that intent to turnover and low job satisfactions are among the consequent outcomes from organizational politics. As most of the office political game occur in managerial level, thus, it becomes vital to study what type of gender that always confronting with office politics and at what level of designation politics becomes an agenda.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Office Ecosystem

Office ecosystem involves relationship between employees sharing the same working culture and values; and teamwork in organization. Teamwork is an essential part of workplace success. Each employee must work together to set up the perfect working performance, thus, every team member has a specific role to play in accomplishing his tasks on the job. Although it may seem that an organization successfully achieving its mission, but truly it was made possible by employees' effective planning, coordination, and cooperation to get their respective job done. Employers look for people who do not only know how to work well with others, but also understand that not every employee on the team can or will be the one who gets the job done. Everybody in an organization must able to works together to accomplish organization's objectives.

Teamwork involves building relationships and working with other people using a number of important skills and habits including working cooperatively; contributing to groups with ideas; suggestions and effort; communication effectively (both giving and receiving); sense of responsibility; healthy respect for different opinions, customs, and individual preferences; and ability to participate in group decision-making.

Unfortunately, in some organizations employees tend to play politics so that they can be seen as the important play maker for the organization's success.

2.2. Office Politics

It was indicated that in an organization, office politics activities always create conflicts. Stress and negative social exchange behavior are the indicators to understand the reactions to bad office politics (Chang *et al.*, 2009). Employees will feel stressful, frustrated and demotivated if they become the victim from negative office politics activities. This is due to political behavior encompasses those activities, for instance power abuse and bullying, that are not required to one's formal role in the organization. Factor analyses from an organizational climate survey performed by Parker *et al.* (1995) suggested that organizational politics is an important dimension of peoples' perception on work environment that had a stronger relationship with role conflict (Chang *et al.*, 2009). The authors also revealed that perceptions of office politics have strong, positive relationship with strain and turnover intention; and negative relationships with job satisfaction and affective commitment. In particular, perceptions of office politics were associated with increase psychological strain, which associated directly with reduction in work performance, as well as indirectly will increased turnover intentions through reduction of morale (Saiful Azizi Ismail and Daud, 2015).

Sometimes office politics is also referring to office bullying. It may manifest in a form of discrimination for example sabotaging employee's performance appraisal, the denial of promotion and performance related pay awards and, sometimes driving employees who are considered threats and burdens out from their job.

2.3. Gender and Office Politics

Female and male employees perceived differently when it comes to office politics experiences. According to [Kachmar et al. \(2011\)](#) male employees will strive to achieve his personal objective if the office politics perception is high. They will show positive organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) when their behaviors are likely to be noticed by his superior and earn kudos (admiration). In contrast, female employees believe that leaders must behave consistently with ethical manners. Female employees are likely to work in harmonious office environment, having a committed leader and work with a leader who implement ethical management.

[Indartono and Chen \(2011\)](#) have found that employees' gender have moderates the relationship between perception of office politics and trust. Male employees showed higher commitment and trust than female workers in the context of strong organizational politics and perception of equity.

Lauren Schiller from Fortune has interviewed Rosina Racioppi, the President and CEO Women Unlimited Inc. (<http://fortune.com/2016/05/30/office-politics-women-unlimited/>). Racioppi mentioned that female employees work differently comparing to their counterpart. Female employees are more tempted to work in community-minded structure, whereas, male employees are more tend to like hierarchical structure. Women employees tend to get job done and the quality of the result will show their performance. They are working independently and not building relationships. As a result, female employees always become the victim of office discrimination. Thus, Racioppi urged women employees to keep on showing their best performance in performing tasks and starts demanding for better benefits and position base on their job performance. Racioppi also advise the management to foresee individual trajectory of talent and its impact to one's job performance and career development.

[Lien \(2005\)](#) has done a study on office politics in Chinese people perspective. According to her, eventhough Taiwanese society is influenced by Western thinking, traditional Chinese cultural values in gender still effect the perception on female employees' performance. Female employees are disrespectful. They are treated as lower status employees in organizational hierarchy then male employees. In her qualitative study, she discovered that male bosses treated female employees as "small office girls" regardless the education background. Female employees are given less power and boring tasks. Lien's study has rejecting the human capital theory that explains the role of female employees is less important because of family reasons and lower productivity compared than male employees. In her study, she found that female employees' can expressed their career aspirations and saw themselves as profitable workers who would not leave their work even if they were a more suitable job.

2.4. Designation and Office Politics

Office politics may affect normal organizational process where it may damage productivity and performance at individual and organizational levels. [Dhar \(2009\)](#) has explored qualitatively on how employees behave in living with organizational politics. He found that 90% respondents feel uneasy working in politics office environment. They said politics is an evil that kills employees' morale.

[Witt and Myers \(1991\)](#) noted that there are some managers avoid participative decision making and sharing information with their subordinates. These managers decide to maintain their power and authority to keep their subordinates unaware with their intention and their style of management. Some of these managers usually believe that they have more information than their subordinates and thus do not want to engage with participative decision making. A study on office politics amongst Indian Organizations performed by [Sharma and Gautam \(2014\)](#) has revealed that office politics has a significant and positive relationship with organizational designation. This study showed that the employees at lower designation will play political game if they found that their superior has a tendency in playing office politics. This study involved respondents in managerial level (i.e managers and executives). They suggested the management to look into the existence of office politics in organization where this situation may drive employees' suffocation in career development which will create employees demotivation to show good performance in performing jobs.

3. Research Methodology

This study is categorized as descriptive study because it examined descriptively the perception on organizational politics amongst government officers. The total of 130 respondents has been selected by using proportionate stratified random sampling. Questionnaires were distributing 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 Kacmar \(1992\)](#).

In data screening reliability, linearity, normality and outlier's were performed. In order to analyze descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentage were executed while t-test and ANOVA were used to test the differences in gender and levels of designation towards perceptions of office politics(POPS).

3.1. Reliability Test

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)	a. General Political Behavior	15	.609
	b. Go ahead to get along		
	c. Pay and promotion policies		

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 *et al.*, 1998). Meyers *et al.* (2006) have categorized correlation coefficient value of .5, .3 and .1 as large, moderate and small.

3.2. Data Analysis

In data screening, the scatter 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. Eigenvalue Table
Total Variance Explained

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Dimension	1	3.802	34.568
	2	1.488	13.524
	3	1.312	11.930

Table-3. Factor Analysis Result

Factor	Dimensions	KMO Value / Bartlett test	Reliability test (alpha value)
Perception of Politics (POPS)	1. Get along to go ahead	.806 / .000	.834
	2. Factor 2 (consists only one item)		N/A
	3. Factor 3 (consists 1 item of "get along to get ahead" and 1 item of "pay and promotion")		.338

3.3. Descriptive Analysis

This study involves 103 respondents who are civil servant grade 41 to 52 at Wisma Persekutuan Anak Bukit, Kedah, Malaysia. From the total of respondents, 63 of them or 61.2% have experiences in office politics or organizational politics. After factor analysis, only get-along-to-get-ahead dimension was reliable to represent office politics amongst government officers. This dimension is referring to the ability of officer in manipulating his power within his span of control to achieve his self-interest (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). Even though the t-test analysis doesn't show the differences on POPS among gender at significant level $p < 0.05$, the cross tabulation has exhibited that 64.44% female officers have experience in office politics compares to their counterpart. The percentage of male officers experiencing POPS is 58.62%.

Table-4. T-Test Result

	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
go_ahed_to_get_along	.112	101	.911	.01463	.13025

Table-5. Cross Tabulation Result on POPS Between Gender

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Office_Politics_Experience	Yes	34	29	63
	No	24	16	40
Total		58	45	103

In examining the differences of POPS among respondents according to their designation, ANOVA test was performed. The result exhibited that there was no differences between groups on POPS at significant level $p < 0.05$. Although the result of ANOVA doesn't show any differences between groups, but descriptively, 34 officers have experienced office politics while 13 assistant directors experienced office politics.

Table-6. ANOVA Result

go_ahead_to_get_along					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.951	3	.317	1.147	.337
Within Groups	17.964	99	.276		
Total	18.915	102			

Table-7. Cross Tabulation Result on POPS Between Designation

		Designation				Total
		Assistant Officer	Officer	Assistant Director	Director	
Office_Politics_Experience	Yes	4	34	13	12	63
	No	14	19	0	7	40
Total		18	53	13	19	103

4. Discussion

It is an interesting fact in this study that 61.2% respondents agree that they have experiencing office politics during their career in government agency. This percentage is very high and it may jeopardize employees' perception on decent work environment in organization. This study has descriptively proving the similar perception in office politics between gender and designation. Both T-test and ANOVA tests showed no significant difference between groups of employees. Even though through t-test and ANOVA there were no significant differences, but in terms of frequency, female employees and higher level officers experiencing more office politics compared to their counterparts. Previous studies have given negative consequences regarding bad political game in an office such as high turnover, low organizational citizenship behavior and increase frustrations. In government agency in Malaysia, the total of female employees is as same as male employees. If their working motivation decrease due to bad political game, for instance they are been discriminated by management or their counterpart peers, this phenomenon will effect organization's overall service performance. The similar situation will also happen if bad political game always happen amongst management workers. We realize that middle and top management levels always strive to achieve operational and strategic organizational objectives. If office politics becomes the barrier to achieve these objectives, the organizational performance may be disintegrated.

Top management must control the existence of office politics activities for instance power abuse, discrimination and office bully. Hence, teamwork must be encouraged in office ecosystem. When employees work together to accomplish a goal, everyone benefits. Employers might expect to "see" this in action in different ways. For example, team members in the workplace plan ahead and work cooperatively to assign tasks, assess progress, and deliver on time. They will having professional discussions during which differing approaches and opinions might be shared and assessed in a respectful manner. Even when certain employees end up with tasks that were not their first choices, jobs get done with limited complaints because it is in the spirit of teamwork and with the overall goal in mind. A leader or manager may often serve as the teamwork facilitator. In this case, team members participate respectfully in discussion, carry out assigned tasks, and refer to the leader in the best interest of the goal. Consensus is wonderful, but not always possible, and an assigned leader will often support and facilitate the decision-making necessary for quality teamwork to exist.

Although office politics is always seen as bringing a bad impression, bear in mind that it is also needed 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. Thus, an officer needs to manipulate his power to gain authority and respect from subordinates in order to achieve organization goals. But unethical manipulation of power may create conflict and dispute in organization. Therefore, organizational politics must be performed wisely in order to create a harmonious industrial relations environment and to eliminate worker's discrimination.

5. Conclusion

Office politics may affect normal organizational process where it may damages productivity and performance at individual and organizational levels. Office politics is an evil that kills employees' morale. Office politics not only

disturbs the organizational culture and working environment but also affects the mental well-being of the employees. It was observed during the analysis that there is no significant difference on the office politics perception between gender and level of designation, hence management is advised to look into this factor and resolve the office politics as it effects the organizational ecosystem and sometimes good employees suffers and eventually get demotivated towards hard work and organizational goals. Management can minimize the politics by imparting confidence in the workers by providing them fair justice and ample and fair opportunities to grow with a decent amount of success rate for each individual employee.

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