Research Article
Employee's Perception of Organizational Politics and its Relationship with Stress

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Abstract: The antecedent to job stress has been investigated in this study as job stress badly affects people's mental as well as physiological health. Extensive literature review on organizational politics reveals that Job stress is one of its inevitable outcomes. The purpose of this research is to empirically test the relationship between perception of organizational politics and job stress, in the context of Pakistan. Sample size of 70 employees from various organizations of Peshawar, Abbottabad and Islamabad were collected. Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression were used to test the hypothesis. The result supports our prediction that perception of organizational politics is significantly related to job stress. Based on the findings of this study, related implications and future avenues are also discussed.

Keywords: Job stress, Perception of organizational Politics (PoP)

INTRODUCTION

Employees are the back bone and valuable assets for any organization. Organization will focus on the performance of the employees and the factors which will directly and indirectly affect the performance of the employees. An important factor which affects the performance of an employee at work is perception of organizational politics. Politics is a common phenomenon of almost every organization (Vigoda and Cohen, 2002a). It is unlikely to have a politics free organization because organizations are social entities where employees make efforts individually and in groups for valued resources, struggle for power, involve in conflicts and execute different influential tactics to get the benefits and serve their self interests (Molm, 1997). Therefore, organizational politics is the severe problem which is being faced by the human resource management now a day in both public and private sectors. Perception of organizational politics directly affects the study of employees and causes a high level of job stress.

This study is focused on investigating the impact of this perception of organizational politics on job stress which is under-explored especially in the context of Pakistan. Nevertheless, this study will be an important contribution to literature. Mayes and Allen (1977) have suggested that practicing managers to be able to play a larger role in management should learn more about political processes. Poon (2003) suggested that keeping in view its importance at work place; organizational politics requires to be investigated more expansively. The knowledge gained from this research would help managers to know, anticipate and deal with political behaviors encountered in organizations, in a better way.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception of organizational politics: Perception is "a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment" (Robbins *et al.*, 2008). Perception of organizational politics consists of an individual's observation of others' self-interested behaviors, such as the careful manipulation of organizational policies (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). However, one's perceptions can largely be different from objective reality. In organizations, people behave on the basis of their perceptions about reality, not reality itself. Ferris *et al.* (1989a) emphasized that "organizational politics is a subjective perception, but not necessarily an objective reality" (p 0.157). The basis for this argument is that even if an individual's perception of political affect on organizational activities and decision making processes is a misperception of actual events, this perception is part of the individuals' views of reality and, therefore, will drive their associated cognitive and behavioral responses (Porter, 1976). However, perception of organizational politics has negative work outcomes and

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is harmful for employees as well as for organization (Byrne, 2005).

Mintzberg (1983) define organizational politics as "individual or group behavior that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimate-sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise" (p 0.172). One school of thought considers politics as a functional means for organization to enable managers to get the study done through creating political environment and competition (Pfeffer, 1981). Hitherto, others discern politics more narrowly and view politics as a dysfunctional tool because employees involved in politics do things that are focused on achieving their self-interest (Cropanzano et al., 1997). The concern of this study is to explore dysfunctional aspects of politics particularly job stress which reduces the performance level of employees at workplace.

Ferris et al. (1989b) argued that the politics is a three dimensional construct. Kacmar and Ferris (1991) described these dimensions as: General Political Behavior; political behavior is high in organizations where no rules and regulations are available or are not clearly defined to govern actions by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). Another important factor is when decisions are made under un-certainty it may found to be influenced by politics (Drory and Romm, 1990). Scarcity of valued resources such as transfers, raises, office space, budgets causes rivalry among individuals and groups that leads toward politics. Organizations which have limited valuable resources may have high political environment (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). Go Along to Get Ahead; in organization behavior of individuals that involves no action (e.g., remaining silent) to get valuable resources is described as "go along to get ahead" by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). Kacmar and Carlson (1997) further said that go along to get to the ahead, can be a logical and favorable approach to take in order to precede one's own self-interests and benefits when working in a political environment. Pay and Promotion Policies; is the last dimension of perception of politics that involves how organizations and employees behave politically through policy implementation and decision making (Ferris et al., 1989a). Normally, performance evaluation is the basis of pay and promotion policies in organizations. It has been found that performance evaluation and promotion systems are often quite political in nature (Dyke, 1990).

Job stress: Stress is an inevitable outcome of socio-economic complexity and to some extent; it's a stimulant as well. It is directly related to job as well to employee in the organization. Job stress also known as work stress or occupational stress has been defined as the experience of negative emotional states such as irritation, frustration, worry, anxiety and depression due to aspects related to work (Kyriacou, 2001). According to Beehr (1990), stress can be defined as any attribute of the workplace that makes an employee to experience

discomfort. Matteson and Ivancevich (1987) explained stress as "an adaptive response, moderated by individual differences, that is a consequence of any action, situation, or event that places special demands upon a person" (p. 10). Cropanzano et al. (1997) argues that stress is the subjective feeling that work demands exceed the individual's belief in his or her ability to cope.

Perception of organizational politics and job stress: Employee perceptions of organizational politics have been linked to a variety of negative outcomes in organizations including low levels of OCB, task performance, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Cropanzano et al., 1997). Yet, researchers' knowledge of antecedents and outcomes remains incomplete (Kacmar et al., 1999).

Researchers in behavioral psychology have shown that stress can be good or be a threat depending on the level of stress perceived by the individual. Previous studies suggest that organizational politics may function as a potential work stressor for employees that may lead to job stress. Workplace politics is not a passing event but a continuous activity that encompasses and operates in the organizational sphere, therefore, its impact on employees accumulates over time. Gilmore et al. (1996) proposed organizational politics as one source of stress at the workplace with the potential for dysfunctional outcomes at both the individual and the organizational level. Literature gives strong support that the politics move towards different stress related impacts at job (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987). Number of studies empirically tested the relationship of these two constructs that is politic and stress. Ferris et al. (1989b) purposed that perception of organizational politics can be one of the reasons of stress at job. From mid 1990s, these two construct were paid much more attention theoretically as well as empirically like Gilmore et al. (1996) anticipated that politics is one of the stressors. Cropanzano et al. (1997) studied in detail the relation of politics with individual stress related variables like fatigue, somatic and job tension and found significantly positive relationship between politics and stress related aspects. Ferris et al. (1996a) empirically examined this relationship with sample size of 822 university employees and found significantly positive correlation between perceived politics and stress. Ferris et al. (1996b) predicted that there are some resemblances in both constructs like both variables (politic and stress) are perception based. Secondly both constructs are situational based where people may lose or get something depending on how they react to the situations. On the basis of these similarities, Vigoda (2002b) inferred that stress is an individual's response to work related environmental stressors, one of which can be politics. Vigoda further explained that employees who face high pressure on job due to perceived politics may also experience great stress and show nervous behavior.

According to studies conducted by Ferris *et al.* (1996a) those who feel that they can't cope with an unfair, unjust and political environment and have other employment opportunities, usually adopt a 'flight' response and quit their jobs. Others, who don't have alternatives, choose to stay and decide whether to 'fight' the system or adjust and abide by with its norms (Selye, 1975). Either way, those who stay in the organization are exposed to a greater risk of stress due to their inability to cope with the political realities of organizations. In a recent analysis, Vigoda (2002b) identified several studies which provide evidence for a direct liaison between politics and stress-based outcomes. These outcomes include job anxiety (Ferris *et al.*, 1994), job stress (Valle and Perrewe, 2000), job tension, somatic tension, fatigue and burnout (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997).

The literature on organizational politics and job stress shows that there is a relation between both of them and it has been highly investigated in developed countries. The nature of this relation is needed to be investigated, with respect to Pakistan, which is a gap that is needed to be filled.

MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS

When individuals involve in organizational politics, others' perceptions regarding the political nature of the work environment may increase. These perceptions coupled with more uncertainty and ambiguity in the organization may increase job stress. Ferris *et al.* (1989a) proposed a positive relationship between POP and job stress. Also a study conducted by Azeem *et al.* (2010) proved that there is a significant positive relationship between perception of organizational politics and job stress. Significant past research has also supported this proposal (Ferris *et al.*, 1996b; Valle and Perrewe, 2000). Ferris *et al.* (1993) found a negative relationship whereas; Hochwarter *et al.* (1999) did not find a significant relationship between POP and job stress. Therefore, on the basis of above mentioned literature this research hypothesis has been formed.

Hypothesis: Perception of organizational politics is positively related to Job stress (Fig. 1).

Schematic diagram: In this model Perception of Organizational Politics is taken as a independent variable and stress is taken as a dependent variable to check if POP effect stress positively or not.

METHODOLOGY

Sources of data: Since it is a causal study, therefore, both primary and secondary data have been used. Primary data is collected through structured self-administered questionnaires. Questionnaires were circulated among employees of different ranks belonging to different organizations of Peshawar,
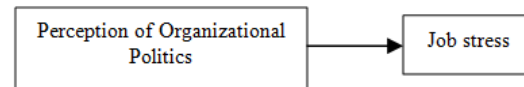

Fig. 1: Schematic diagram

Abbottabad and Islamabad. Secondary data were collected from available books, publications, journals and recent articles relating to stress and POP of employees.

Sample: A cross-sectional analysis is conducted to analyze the effect of Perception of organizational politics on employee's stress during work. A convenient sampling technique is used to collect data. 70 questionnaires were distributed among the employees of different organizations, all of which were duly filled and returned.

Measures: The overall questionnaire consists of two sections and Likert Type scale has been used ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure the dependent and Independent variables. The questionnaire items, format and procedures were derived and constructed on the basis of existing research studies and literature related to PoP and Stress. The first section is about independent variable i.e., Perception of organizational politics. 12 items are used in the measure to describe general political behavior, political behavior to "get ahead" and ambiguity in pay and promotion policies and rules adapted from 'The Perception of Organizational Politics Scale' developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). The second section is about dependent variable i.e., Stress. 7 items are used to measure stress, developed by House and Rizzo (1972).

Statistical techniques used: Data has been collected in a period of one and a half month. The statistical program used for the data analyses and presentation is Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 15.0. Since it is the case of measure of association and there is one dependent and one independent variable so simple regression is used as a statistical test. Also correlation test is applied to find out the relationship between stated variables. Descriptive statistics based on frequency tables are used to analyze the demographic data of respondents.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographic characteristics of the respondents: Out of the 70 respondents 80% are male while 20% are female. Most of the respondents' i.e., 61.4% are between the ages of 20-30 years. Respondents between the ages of 31-40 years were 18.6%. Similarly 12.9% are between the ages of 41-50 years, while 7.1% respondents are between the ages of 51-60 years. 25.7% recipients are from private sector while 74.3%

Table 1: Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig. F change
1	0.384	0.148	0.135	11.770	0.001

a: Predictors: (constant), politicsm; b: dependent variable: stress

Table 2: Correlations

		Politics
Stress	Pearson correlation	0.384
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.001

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

Table 3: Coefficients

Variables	Standardized β	t-statistics	Sig.
Constant		0.816	0.418
Politics	0.384	3.431	0.001

recipients are from government sector. Of the given sample 17.1% are in 17th grade, 55.7% respondents are in 18th grade, 20% in 19th grade, 5.7% in 20th grade, while 1.4% are in 21st grade. Of the 70 respondents 21.4% have a job experience of less than 1 year, the highest percentage of experience, that is, 51.4% is between 1-10 years, 14.3% have experience between 11-20 years, while, 12.9% have job experience between 21-30 years. Graduates are 25.7%, whereas, 74.3% are postgraduates.

Reliability: Cronbach alpha is used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire. Reliability for the overall scale is 0.714, generally considered acceptable for a reliable scale in social sciences; it suggests a strong positive item-homogeneity in this questionnaire.

Regression and correlation: A simple regression analysis is performed to determine the extent to which the perception of organizational politics will explain the variance in job stress of employees. The Linear Regression Model with two variables have R^2 of 0.148, expressed in a percentage explains that our hypothesized model, that is perception of organizational politics explains 14.8% of the variance in the job stress of employees. Furthermore, the F-statistic assesses the overall significance of our model. The value of F-statistic is 11.770 with $p<0.05$. Therefore, it is concluded that our model is highly significant, thus we can assume that there is a linear relationship between the variables in our model (Table 1).

Table 2 presents the correlation between PoP and criterion variable stress, i.e., $r = 0.384$, $p<0.05$. It shows that there is a positive medium relationship between PoP and stress.

Hypothesis testing:
Hypothesis 1: The beta value shows that 1 unit increase in the value factor perception of organizational politics would increase 0.384 units (38.4%) in job stress, other variables being held constant. Perception of organizational politics shows statistically significant unique contribution in explaining the job stress with $p<0.05$. While t-statistics of perception of politics also

account for significant positive variation in dependent variable, that is, Job Stress ($t = 3.431$, $p<0.05$). (Table 3). Resultantly null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is accepted.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The critical issue addressed by this study is to what extent, do the political perceptions of employees influence certain outcomes such as job stress. From the abovementioned results, I found empirical support for the hypotheses of the study. The relationship between perception of organizational politics and job stress shows a significant positive relationship. This clearly shows that if the organization's environment is politically charged, the employees would face stress at their job leading to adverse impact on both employees and organization. This study attempts to bridge the two major constructs of human resource management, perceived organizational politics and stress. The uniqueness of this research is that it is in the context of developing country and it will be of great interest to the organizational behavior researchers to compare it with the empirical evidence from western context.

Our findings show that perceived politics is the antecedent to job stress; this can help managers to ensure justice in performance appraisal systems resulting to fair rewards, employment decisions and pay & promotion policies, discouraging the political and manipulative behavior of certain individuals/groups to overcome the negative outcomes of politics.

HR managers should try to avoid accumulation of scarce resources in the hands of some individuals/groups and ensure that there is equitable distribution of resources within all sections of the organization.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE AVENUES

There is a limitation in our empirical study, due to short time span and financial constraints convenience sampling was used that might limit the external validity of our results and findings cannot be generalized in broader work settings. Although the current study examined perception of politics in relation to stress, other variables such as job satisfaction, workplace deviant behaviors, job commitment, job performance and role of mediators can also be considered in future research in order to extend the current study in a wider work environment.

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