

PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS INFLUENCES ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG SUPPORTING STAFF MEMBERS AT A SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract

This study investigated influences of perceived organizational politics on organizational commitment of supporting staff members at a selected higher education institution. Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire on perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment. Correlations were investigated to determine whether there were any relationships between variables. Multiple Regression Analysis was also used to examine whether participants demographic variables are predictor of perceived organizational politics. Results showed a significant and positive relationship between employees' perceived organizational politics and two dimensions of organizational commitment (affective commitment & continuance commitment). Results also showed that there is no significant relationship between perceived organizational politics. Female academic supporting staff members showed higher levels of perceived organizational politics, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment than male academic supporting staff members. Gender and tenure were found to be predictor of perceived organizational politics. Results also showed that qualification was not a significant predictor of employee's perception of organizational politics.

Keywords: Perceived organizational politics, affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, support academic staff

Introduction

Organizations comprises of people from different backgrounds, with different approaches of conducting their day to day activities within the organization. As such, wherever employees are involved, some type of strain or what has frequently been indicated to as politics will rise and significantly impact employees' goals or intentions, conduct, emotional well-being and additionally how they complete their work and how individuals advance within the organization (Gandz & Murray, 1980; Madison, Allen, Renwick & Mayes, 1980).

Often politics is more associated with individuals or groups competing for limited resources. With limited resources employees are bound to not see eye to eye. Vigoda (2000) is of the opinion that the notion of politics is more frequently connected to the manipulative or controlling force-grubbing conduct of employees and the same is considered when organizational politics is mentioned. According to Newstrom (2007), organizations are a complex social entities or elements which are open to clashes or conflicts and rivalry between the interests and intentions of distinctive department, divisions, groups or individual and along these lines politics within the organizations are an inevitable reality which is entrapped inside of management systems that connections, standards or norms, procedures, performance execution and results are exceedingly impacted and influenced by it. Even though politics are inevitable reality, they can be managed and controlled within the organization. However, if not managed and controlled to a minimum level, it can lead to organizational discomfort and also results to low level of employees' commitment.

Organizational commitment is one of the foremost goals considering the efforts of organization regarding maintenance of its existence (Yavuz, 2010). As such, organizational commitment is the level of allegiance an employee feels for his employer or their employing organization whenever their level of commitment is high. Demirel and Goc (2013) highlighted that employees with greater level of organizational commitment are more productive, compatible, have more loyalty towards his work, possesses more responsibility and satisfaction resultantly cost lesser to the organization.

Organizational commitment plays an important role on success of the organization and on the continued existence of the organization. Commitment has a stronger need for belonging than the average employee and has carried out human resource practices based on seniority for a long while, and they have demanded strong organizational loyalty from their employees (Park, Lee & Kabst, 2008). Employees' commitment to their employing organization is one of the key strategies of competitive advantage. It is important to understand how employees can be kept committed to their organization to achieve great results for the success of the organization.

Coetzee (2005) believes that in today's business world it is no longer good enough to have employees who come to work faithfully every day and perform their task independently. On the other hand it is still very imperative to have faithful employees who do their job tasks independently as this can be vital for the organizations' success but employee's level of commitment remains vital. However, this might not be enough. Employees might also want to be part of a successful organization which provides a good income and good opportunities of growth and development to them. If politics is perceived to be high within the organization, employees' level of commitment might be affected.

Hu (2010) in his study of "Perceived Organizational Politics and Organizational Commitment: Exploring the Moderating Effect of job security", found that there is a significant negative relationship between perceived organizational politics and affective commitment, as well as normative commitment. He further found a positive relationship between perceived organizational politics and continuance commitment. Both, organizational politics and organizational commitment may be perceived as a threat to the organization's success if not treated as vital factors. In the context of university employment, Odirile, Mpofu, & Montsi (2009) believes that the level of appointment and type of appointment might explain the quality of work life and career progression within the institution. Higher education institutions in South Africa are expected to play a critical role in the development of human resources for social development through the production of knowledge and high-level person power (Mapesela & Strydom, 2004). Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the overall performance of higher education institution does not only depends upon their academic staff member, supporting staff members plays a significant role within the organization and ultimately their level of perception of politics from organization and their level of commitment.

Perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment are widely studied variables in management literature (Vigoda, 2000; Hu, 2010; Bergmann, Lester, De Meuse, & Grahn, 2011; Jam, Khan, Zaidi & Muzaffar, 2011) which are precursors for the organization's success. However, very little information is available on the influence of perceived organizational politics on employee's level of organizational commitment, especially among supporting academic staff members (secretaries, principal administration officers, administration officers and messengers in higher education institution).

Problem statement

Taking into consideration that other studies have been conducted on the relationship between perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment (Thiphaphongphakaphun, 2012, Yılmaz, Özer & Günlük, 2014; Saxena & Puri, 2015), very little information is known regarding the relationship between perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment, particularly among supporting staff members in higher education institutions, South Africa. Therefore, the current study was conducted with the aim to answer the question whether there is a significant relationship between perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment among supporting academic staff members (secretaries, principal administration officers, administration officers and messengers) at a selected higher education institution in South Africa. In other words, the current study was conducted to determine if organizational politics have an influence on organizational commitment.

Research objectives

- To investigate the relationship between perceived organizational politics and affective commitment
- To investigate the relationship between perceived organizational politics and continuance commitment
- To investigate the relationship between perceived organizational politics and normative commitment
- To determine if gender, educational qualification and tenure are predictors of perceived organizational politics

Research hypotheses

H1: There is a positive significant relationship between perceived organizational politics and affective commitment.

H2: There is a positive significant relationship between perceived organizational politics and continuance commitment.

H3: There is a positive significant relationship between perceived organizational politics and normative commitment.

H4: Gender, educational qualification and tenure are predictors of perceived organizational politics

Literature review***Perceived organizational politics***

The concept of perceived organizational politics has received considerable attention in the last few decades. Vigoda (2006) believes that perceived organizational politics developed as an issue of prime importance and essential for a foundation or organization, in any division, market, field and culture. According to literature, over the past years, perceived organizational politics has been widely studied and it came forth as an effective and actual forecaster regarding work outcomes that an organization could undoubtedly be challenged (Vigoda & Drory, 2010; Bodla, Danish & Nawaz, 2012; Vigoda, 2001).

One thing that becomes painfully evident and confusing when reviewing the literature on organizational politics is that there is no single or rather widely accepted definition of the term, it has been defined differently by different scholars, almost every article written in this area of study makes note of the fact that the concept is difficult to define (Cropanzano & Kacmar, 1995). In other words there is no common basic definition that captures the entire complexity of organizational politics.

Ferris, Harrell-Cook, and Dulebohn (2000, p. 90) defined as “Perceived organizational politics involves an individual’s attribution of behaviors of self-serving intent and is defined as an individual’s subjective evaluation about the extent to which the work environment is characterized by co-workers and supervisors who demonstrate such self-serving behaviour”. Gallagher and Laird (2008) defined perceived organizational politics as an individual’s view which is normally characterized by colleagues and supervisors demonstrating behaviors that are self-serving. Bodla and Danish (2009) further argued that organizational politics has also been defined as aspects of organizational life and relates to power, authority and influence. Politics is often regarded as a fact of life in organizations. According to Dhar (2009), the importance of organizational politics lies in its potential consequences and effect on work outcomes. Theoretical arguments suggest that politics often interferes with normal organizational processes such as decision making, promotion, and rewards, and damages productivity and performance at individual and organizational levels. Miller, Byrne, Rutherford & Hansen (2009) states that organizational politics are ubiquitous and considered necessary for normal business functioning. Miller, Byrne, Rutherford & Hansen (2009) suggest that organizational politics is a social influence process in which behaviour is strategically designed to maximize long-term and short-term self-interest, that is either consistent with or in opposition to others’ interests.

In the opinion of Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, and Pondy (2000), organizational politics is a social influence process that involves behaviors that are strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest that may be consistent with or at the expense of other’s interests. Consequently, Vigoda (2002) advocates that organizational politics may be advantageous or beneficial to the organization and other organization stakeholders. Vigoda (2002) further recorded some positive outcomes of organizational politics which include career advancement, recognition and status, and enhanced sense of control. According to Ogungbamila (2013, p.128), “the negative consequences of organizational politics are ‘loss of strategic power, negative feelings (and actions) toward other”.

In the opinion of Vigoda (2000), the study of employees’ perception on political behavior, both actual and perceptual politics within the organization, have received growing acknowledgment or recognition and scholarly attention over the years reaching its peak in the 1990’s and continues to be because of the consequences it has been shown to have on significant behavioral outcomes to employees (e.g. organizational commitment) as well as consequences on the organization as a whole.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is perhaps one of the most pervasive issues in organizational studies of the last several decades, because it has established the most important commitment in terms of its influence on work performance and on workers’ desire to remain in the organization (Freund, 2005).

Regardless of numerous articles that have been written and published on the subject of organizational commitment, there has been lack of consensus on its definition (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Organizational commitment has been variably and extensively defined, measured and researched, and the concept, as a result, has been criticised for lack of precision, giving rise to inconsistent results from various studies (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Despite the lack of consensus on the various definitions, conceptualizations and measurements, a common theme is shared across all these deviations, namely that organizational commitment is considered to be a connection of the individual to the organization (Martin & Roodt, 2008). Although various studies on the construct of organizational commitment have come with a variety of definitions, there is a widespread agreement in the literature that organizational commitment is an attitude (Solinger, Van Olffen & Roe, 2008).

Lee (2000) claimed that most definitions of organizational commitment describe the construct in terms of the extent to which employees identify with and are involved with an organization.

As stated by Joolideh and Yeshodhara (2008), several alternative models of commitment were proposed in the 1980s and early 1990s; multidimensionality was common to all (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010) highlighted that there are three components of organizational commitment, namely; affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment.

As defined by literature, affective commitment refers to an emotional attachment to an organization and identification with that organization (Colakoglu, Culha & Atay, 2010; Edwards, Bell, Arthur & Decuir, 2008). The counterpart to affective organizational commitment is continuance organizational commitment, which considers the idea that individuals do not leave a company for fear of losing their benefits, taking a pay cut, and not being able to find another job (Colakoglu, Culha & Atay, 2010). The perceived cost might be from the individual's sense of belonging, benefits associated with the position of individual employee, promising future in the organization.

The other component of organizational commitment is normative commitment. According to Coetsee (2005), normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Coetsee (2005) further highlighted that the feeling of obligation to remain with an organization may result from the internalisation of normative pressures exerted in an individual prior to entry into the organization, or following entry. In particular, Wang and Yao (2006) examine that as cross-cultural research becomes more and more popular, the role of normative commitment is gaining more attention. However, the value of normative organizational commitment in predicting working behaviour needs to be clarified.

The practice of the organizations with regards to their employees' commitment is different if we compare the past to the present (Madi, Abu-Jarad & Alqahtani, 2012). Previously, organizations secured the loyalty of their employees by guaranteeing job security. However, Madi, Abu-Jarad and Alqahtani (2012) maintained that many organizations have practiced downsizing, restructuring and transformation as a response to competitive pressures. Yet, they created a less secure organizational climate. As a result, a growing number of employees feel that they were victims of empty promise. Maintaining employee organizational commitment remains one of the challenges facing organizations in this competitive world (Bergmann, Lester, De Meuse & Grahn, 2011).

Research methodology

The quantitative research design was used in this study to investigate the relationship between perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment among. The study population consist of both male and female supporting staff members at a selected higher education institution in South Africa. The total size of the population was seventy-one (N=71). Using the RaoSoft sample size calculator, a minimum recommended sample size of 61 respondents was obtained. The sample from this study consisted of Sixty one supporting staff members at a selected high education institution. The respondents were selected using a simple random sampling method. A self-administered questionnaire was used to solicit data from all the sampled supporting staff members.

Participants and setting

Sixty one (61) supporting staff members (secretaries, principal administration officers, administration officers and messengers) from a South African higher education institution participated in this study. Most participants ($n = 41$, 67.2%) held under-graduate qualifications (see Table 1 for demographics).

Table 1: Demographic variables: gender, age, highest qualification and tenure

Variable(s)	Categories	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	23	40.7
	Female	38	59.7
Age	25 years and below	3	17.6
	26-35 Years	13	29.1
	36-45 years	16	30.5

	46 years and above	29	22.5
Race	Black	54	90.4
	White	4	7.3
	Indian	1	1.3
	Coloured	2	1.0
Highest qualification	Diploma	6	9.8
	Degree	41	67.2
	Postgraduate Degree	14	23
Tenure	Less than 1 year	13	18.5
	1-5year	19	34.8
	6 years and above	29	46.7

Instruments

Participants completed self-report surveys on perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment. Participants also provided important demographic data. Perceived organizational politics was measured using Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) (Kacmar & Carlson, 1994). POPS is a 10-item version of the modified 40-item scale originally developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) to measure the degree to which employees perceive that the behaviour of the organization and other organization members are self-serving. Examples of items included are: “There are persons in this organization who always get things their way because no one wants to challenge them” and “Favouritism rather than merit determines who gets promoted in this organization”. Several studies have examined the reliability (alpha coefficients) of the POPS, Vigoda (2000) reported a 0.77 reliability coefficient for the scale. Ladebo and Oloruntoba (2005) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.79, using a Nigerian sample. With the present sample, a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.832 was found (see Table 2 for reliability indices of scores from the study measures).

The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Allen & Meyer, 1997) is an 18 item measure of employee organizational commitment that included affective commitment (6-items), normative commitment (6-items) and continuance commitment (6-items). Examples of items included are “I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization”; “Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization right now” and “Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now”. Several studies have examined the reliability of the OCQ. The OCQ has been widely used as a tool for measuring organizational commitment with reliable and valid results Allen and Meyer (1997) reported 0.87 for the affective commitment scale, 0.75 for the continuance commitment scale, and 0.79 for the normative commitment scale. An alpha coefficient of 0.748 was recorded for the measure.

Table 2: Cronbach’s alpha reliable coefficients

Cronbach’s coefficient alpha	Number	Alpha
Variables	Of items	
Perceived Organizational Politics Scale	10	0.832
Organizational Commitment Questionnaire	18	0.748
Overall Questionnaire	28	0.839

Procedure

In administering the questionnaire, permission was requested from Human Resource Management (HRM) Director and Heads of Departments (HODs) of the higher education institution to distribute questionnaires to all academic supporting staff members. Consent was also requested from the respondents before distribution of the questionnaires. Questionnaire distribution was done in such a way as to cause no disturbance to work performance of the respondents. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents during breaks (during lunch time and after hours) and also the respondents were made aware of the time they have to complete the questionnaire. Respondents were given seven working days to complete the questionnaires. After seven days, questionnaires were collected from the respondents for inspection before they were coded.

Data analysis

A statistical computer package, Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23.0 was used to process the results. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was carried out to measure the relationships between the variables, i.e. between perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment. Multiple Regression Analysis was also used to examine whether participants demographic variables are predictor of perceived organizational politics.

Results and discussion

Firstly, as shown in table 3, the correlational evidence proposed a significant relationship between perceived organizational politics and affective commitment ($r=0.338$; $p=0.005$). This means that politics have an influence on employee's emotional attachment to an organization and identification with the organization. Therefore, a significant change in organizational politics will result in a significant change in affective commitment. When the level of organizational politics is high, employee's level of emotional attachment to their employing organization will be affected negatively. Hu (2010) also found similar results. Contrary, Jam, Khan, Zaidi and Muzaffar (2011) found no significant relationship between perceived organizational politics and affective commitment. Secondly, based on the results of the study, as shown in table 3, the correlational evidence also suggests a strong significant relationship between perceived organizational politics and continuance commitment ($r=0.386$; $p=0.001$). In other words, as organizational politics changes, continuance commitment is more likely to change. Thus, the degree to which employees feel committed to their organization by virtue of the costs that they feel are associated with leaving will be influenced by organizational politics. The result was consistent with previous literatures (Jam, Khan, Zaidi & Muzaffar, 2011).

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients of Perceived organizational politics, Affective Commitment, Continuance Commitment & Normative Commitment.

		Perceived Organizational Politics	Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment
Perceived Organizational Politics	Pearson Correlation	--	0.338**	0.386**	-0.032
	Sig.(2- tailed)		0.005	0.001	0.801
Affective Commitment	Pearson Correlation	0.338**	--	--	--
	Sig.(2- tailed)	0.005			
Continuance Commitment	Pearson Correlation	0.386**	--	--	--
	Sig.(2- tailed)	0.001			

Normative Commitment	Pearson Correlation	-0.032	--	--	--
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.801			

**Statistical significance at $p \leq 0.05$; *Statistical significance at $p \leq 0.01$

Lastly, results show that the relationship between perceived organizational politics and normative commitment did not reach the significant level ($r=-0.32$; $p=0.801$) In other words, the results of the study indicate that organizational politics does not have influence on the employee's feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. Aube, Rousseau and Morin (2007) also found similar results.

The study also hypothesized that that the gender, tenure, highest qualification will predict perceived organizational politics. Therefore, to test this hypothesis, simultaneous multiple regression analysis was put into practice. This test is used when there is no theoretical consideration or previous findings to specify the order to enter the variables into the model ().

Table 4: Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Gender, Highest Qualification & Tenure

	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	P
Model					
<i>Constant</i>	-1.04	0.37		-2.94	0.00
Gender	0.63	0.22	0.29	3.49	0.00*
Highest qualification	-0.07	0.09	-0.7	-0.79	0.44
Tenure	0.24	0.22	0.22	2.33	0.02**
* $p < .01$, ** $p < 0.05$,		Model 1 reported adjusted R^2 of 0.16			

In this current study, all the variables were entered in the model in one step. The model obtained a significant level of 11.091, $p < 0.00$, and accounted for 16% ($R^2 = 0.16$) of the variance in perception of organizational politics. Gender ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.00$), highest qualification ($\beta = -0.7$, $p = 0.44$) and tenure ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.5$), both gender and tenure significantly predicted perceived organizational politics. In other words, employees who have been in one organization for any years have perceived higher organizational politics. As such, their perception of politics within the organization increases along with their years of services. In terms of gender, both males and females perceived organizational politics differently, therefore, gender was also a predictor of perceived organizational politics. Results showed that highest qualification was not a significant predictor of employee's perception of organizational politics. In other words, employees' educational qualification has got nothing to do with the way in which employees perceives organizational politics. For instance, there is no difference between an employee with degree and an employee with honours degree in terms of the way they perceive organizational politics.

Conclusion

Results of this study suggest employee's affective commitment and continuance commitment to be influenced by their organizational politics perceptions. Findings of this study also suggest that employee's normative commitment is not influenced by their organizational politics perception. Nevertheless, these findings are constrained by the fact that the data were self-reported, and only derived from supporting staff members. Due to inconclusive results, further research need to be conducted on the relationship between perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment. Taking into consideration that female academic supporting staff members showed higher levels of perceived organizational politics, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment than male academic supporting staff members, it is important to note that most of the supporting staff members who were participants were females. Gender and tenure were found to be predictor of perceived organizational politics. As such, both males and females perceives' organizational politics differently, and the more an individual employee stays with an institution, he/she is more likely to perceive organizational politics. Results also showed that qualification was not a significant predictor of employee's perception of organizational politics.

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