

The Relationship Between Values, Attitudes and Organisational Politics

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Abstract

There has been a growing concern over the prevalence of organizational politics and by the differing understanding of the impact of organizational politics on the organization and the public at large. According to Ferns and Kachmar (1992), politics in organizations is a simple fact of life. Politics involve seeking power, exercising power, and achieving compromise when appropriate. Effective power is gained from serving other people's self-interest. This research sets out to investigate factors affecting managers' disposition towards organizational politics. In order to investigate this problem, managerial values with its six characteristics or dimensions namely external locus of control, independence, identification of power, need for achievement, concern with status and self-esteem; and attitude with four dimensions namely job satisfaction, life satisfaction, acceptance of others and anomie are hypothesised to affect managers' disposition towards organizational politics. A total of 178 respondents were sampled from various backgrounds in both the public and the private sectors. Three variables namely power motive, ability to accept other people and need for achievement were found to be significant in determining managers' disposition towards organizational politics. Thus, organizations run by managers with high power motive and high need for achievement will tend to display a higher level of organizational politics than those run by managers with low power motive and low need for achievement. The study also found that managers who are able to accept other individuals are less likely to indulge in organizational politics than those who are unable to interact well with others.

Keywords

Values, Attitudes, Organisational, Managers

I. Introduction

Organizational politics is an everyday occurrence and according to Webber (1975), organizational politics is an essential part of organizational life and the members of the organizations are confronted with these realities. Although most managers tend to deny the existence of organizational politics in their organizations, recognizing its occurrences seems to be crucial in managing its effects (Al-Tuhaih and Fleet, 2011). Organizational politics is often expected to flourish in hierarchical, power-based structures or in unclear settings where defined goals, decision processes, and performance standards are absent (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2010).

Drawing upon the work of Zahra (1989) on American executives, this study attempts to establish the relationship between organizational politics and managers' disposition towards it in Malaysia. It is hoped that this will go a long way to bridge the gap and be of relevance for policy-making purposes.

The research question to be answered by this study is to what extent do values and attitude affect organizational politics? The variable of primary interest in this research is the dependent variable of managers' disposition towards organizational politics. The two independent variables are manager's values and manager's attitude. Manager's values are divided into six elements, namely: (1) Locus of control, (2) Independence, (3) Identification of power,

(4) Need for achievement, (5) Concern with status, and (6) Self-esteem. Manager's attitude is divided into four elements: (1) Job satisfaction, (2) Life satisfaction, (3) Acceptance of others, and (4) Anomie.

II. Literature Review

A. Managers Values and Attitudes

Rokeach (1973) defined values as 'a specific' mode of conduct or end-state of existence that is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of experience. Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (1989) cited that values are relatively permanent desire that seem to be good in them, like peace or goodwill. According to Nystrom (1990) values are normative beliefs about proper standards of conduct and preferred desired results. Based on Bounds, Dobbins and Fowler (1995), values represent our convictions about what is right or moral and the way we ought to behave. Robbins (2011) stated that values have both content and intensity attributes. The content attributes propose that a mode of conduct or end-state of experience is important. The intensity attributes specify how important it is. When we rank an individual's values in terms of their intensity, we can obtain that person's value system. According to DeLeon (1994), values are also important when managers act 'proactively' to advocate group's exclusion from the policy process because the proactive managers must not substitute their profession's values for any other interest.

It is important to study the relationship between values system and behaviour in order to understand the managers. England (1967) cited that the personal value systems have some implications on managers and their behaviour. Personal value systems more closely resemble ideology of philosophy than attitude. In certain aspects, an individual's personal value system at any given time can be thought of as the integrated group of attitudes and beliefs resulting from the interaction of his physical or biological self with his environment.

Locus of control refers to the extent of which an organization depends on other individuals or organizations for policy decisions of the organization. Literature review suggested that the managers in an organization with a high degree of external locus of control are more likely to play politics than those with a low level of external locus of control (Wendy and Morrison, 2001). Closely related to external locus of control is the concept of independence. A manager's level of independence is gauged by the extent to which he can make decisions without consulting his superior. The higher the manager's degree of independence will lessen the need for him to be involved in organizational politics.

The concepts of need for achievement and concern with status are closely related with the disposition towards organizational politics. Managers with a high need for achievement are more likely to play politics than managers with a lesser need for achievement. A person's status is the amount of respect and the prestige one is accorded by other people. Managers with a high concern with status are more likely to play politics than those with a lesser concern with status.

Managers with self-esteem evaluate themselves favourably, believing they possess many desirable traits and qualities. The higher a manager's self-esteem the more likely he is to play politics. Literature review suggests a negative relationship between disposition towards organizational politics and job satisfaction, life satisfaction and acceptance of others. Job satisfaction is a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job experiences. Managers who are satisfied with their job tend to be less involved in organizational politics. This is also true for managers who are satisfied with their lives. Acceptance of others is the ability for managers to interact well with other individuals in the organizations. A negative relationship is expected between disposition and acceptance of others because managers who are able to interact well with others are less likely to be involved in organizational politics.

Anomie is defined as a condition of instability in societies or individuals resulting from a breakdown of standards and values or from a lack of purpose or ideas. (Some writers have used it to refer to conditions of individuals). In the psychological usage, anomie means the state of mind of a person who has no standards or sense of continuity or obligation and who has rejected all social bonds. Individuals may feel that community leaders are indifferent to their need that society is basically unpredictable and lacking of order, and that goals are not being realized. Therefore it is assumed that a positive relationship exists between anomie and organizational politics.

B. Previous Research on Organizational Politics

Ferns, Russ and Fandt (1989) proposed that more work should be done on the conditions under which political behaviour occur, the type of political behaviour and their consequences. They agreed with Gandz and Murray (1980) who earlier suggested that rather than exclusively an objective state, it is appropriate to construe organizational politics as a subjective experience and, thus, as a state of mind. Porter (1976) suggested that perceptions are important to study and to understand (even if they are misconceptions) of actual events, in particular subject of organizational politics.

The study by Gandz and Murray (1980) on 428 American managers in public and private organizations discovered several interesting findings. Firstly, 60% of the respondents felt that most casual talk at work is political in nature, and 70% agreed that politics is common in their organizations. Secondly, the majority of the respondents agreed that political behaviour is self-serving and detrimental to the organization in which it occurs. Self-serving behaviour include avoiding the chain of command to get approval and lobbying the top managers to get promoted (Muhammad, 2007). Overall, political behaviour was viewed as bad, unfair, unnecessary and conflict-oriented. Thirdly, people at the lower levels in the organizations perceived more politics exist in the organisation than those people at higher levels. Fourthly, there was no difference in the perceived level of political behaviour in organizations of public or private sectors. Fifthly, more than 70% of the respondents agreed that successful and powerful executives act in a political fashion. They also felt that a person must be a good politician to get ahead in organization. Finally, political behaviour was frequently perceived in areas where there were no explicit policies or procedures to guide people. Political behaviour was easy to observe in the areas of promotions and transfer, delegation of authority, and interdepartmental conditions.

As a whole, the study indicates that there is a universality of political behaviour in organizations and most people has reservations about it. According to Jerry and Starke (1988), individual managers face

a real dilemma: They must either "join the parade" and behave in a political fashion in order to further their careers, or they must decide to opt out of such behaviour, realizing that in doing so they will eventually be reducing their chances of getting ahead. This is a situation where individual managers must make his decision given his or her personal value system and beliefs about what is right or wrong.

McMurry (1973) noted that methods of holding top-management power in an organization might strike many people as devious and Machiavellian. They involve calculated alliance, compromises, and 'deal'. These managers will usually exert political influence in order to benefit or motivate employees to perform (Rosen, Harris and Kacmar, 2009). This is due to the belief that organizational politics does influence the employee's performance (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Such strategies are not always noble and high-minded. From the selfish standpoint of the beleaguered and harassed executives, they have primary merit: they enhance their chances of survival.

According to Judge and Bretz, Jr. (1994), drawing from the past research on influence behaviour and relevant theory from social psychology, the effect of political influence behaviour on career success was hypothesized to depend on the type of influence tactic employed. Results from the sample of past post graduates of two American universities indicated that supervisor-focused tactics, manifesting an ingratiating strategy, resulted in higher levels of success.

Zahra (1987) explored the relationship between organizational politics and the company strategies and performance. The researcher collected data from 55 American manufacturing firms. Controlling for company assets and industry type, organizational politics intensity were associated with various strategy processes and found to be negatively associated with overall company performance. Another important finding from the study was that the stage of company evolution moderated the organizational strategic process relationship.

Zahra (1985) found a correlation between background and work experience with ethics and effect of organizational politics. Data from 302 managers was examined for the association between seven background and work experience variables and managerial attitudes regarding the ethics, locus, effect of organizational politics on the organization, and the motive behind political manoeuvring in the workplace. The results however, showed that the relationship between experience factors and attitude regarding organizational politics is weak.

Previous study also showed a positive relationship between need for achievement and disposition towards organizational politics. Previous research by Alien et al. (1979) showed that organizational politics is related to self-confidence, aggressiveness and ambitiousness. Thus organizational politics can facilitate satisfying one's need for achievement. As a result, executives with a strong need for achievement will have a favourable disposition towards organizational politics.

III. Research Method

A. Sampling

The respondents for this study were executives or managers from various public and private organizations in Penang. A total of 60 organizations were identified and agreed to be involved in this study. From the overall population, samples of 400 executives or managers were selected with the cooperation from their heads of department. A total of 178 usable responses were obtained and

used in the final analysis of this study.

B. Measurement

The independent variables values and attitude was measured using dimensions and items developed by Zahra (1989). The dependent variable in this study, managers' disposition towards organizational politics can be viewed as either positive or negative. Job satisfaction, developed by Smith et al. (1969) was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI). For this study, only two facets of JDI are chosen which consist of workers and co-workers satisfaction. Another facet of job satisfaction, which is related to the job environment i.e. global satisfaction, was taken from Zahra (1989).

IV. Results

The analysis of the measuring instrument used for this study yields Cronbach's Alpha ranges from 0.60 in the facet of achievement to 0.90 for the global satisfaction. Thus, the internal consistency reliability of the measures used in the overall dimensions in this study can be considered as satisfactorily good. The sample consisted of 70.2% males, with a large majority of Malays (53.9%) and Chinese (36.5%). In terms of religion, a majority are Muslims (55.6%) and Buddhists (24.9%). In terms of age, they are about evenly distributed with the largest age group being 40 years and above (39.4%), and a majority of the respondents are married. For their education level, 30.9% have school certificates but a majority of them are holding a university degree (42.7%). In terms of length of service with the current organization, 25.8% and 30.4% are serving between 1 to 5 years and 6 to 15 years respectively, with 52.8% working in large organizations.

A. Relationship between Values, Attitude and Disposition towards Organizational Politics

Discriminant analysis was used to confirm differences in values and attitude dimensions for positive and negative disposition. For the discriminant analysis, the sample was divided into two approximately equal sized groups based upon their scores on their disposition towards organizational politics. This was done by using the median scores as the classification criteria.

Table 1: Discriminant Analysis for Overall Dimensions of Values and Attitude with Disposition towards Organizational Politics

Variables	Wilks Lambda	F	Significant
VALUES			
External locus control	0.992	1.406	0.237
Power	0.990	7.271	0.007 * (0.007* after step 3)
Independence	0.996	0.638	0.425
Achievement	0.988	1.998	0.159 (0.002* after step 3)
Status	0.996	0.684	0.409
Esteem	0.992	3.196	0.075 **
ATTITUDE			
Job Satisfaction	0.998	0.330	0.566
Life Satisfaction	0.999	0.033	0.854
Acceptance	0.975	4.495	0.035 * (0.000* after step 3)
Anomie	0.997	0.036	0.849

*p < 0.05 is significant.

**p < 0.10 is significant.

The results shows that in terms of their disposition towards organizational politics, i) those with high external locus of control do not differ significantly from those with low external locus of control; ii) those with a strong concern for status do not differ significantly from those with low concern with status; iii) those with high need for achievement differ significantly from those with low need for achievement; iv) those with high power motive are significantly different from those with low power motive; v) those with high need for independence do not differ significantly from those with low need for independence; vi) there is no significant relation between self-esteem and disposition towards organizational politics; vii) those who are satisfied with their job do not differ significantly from those who are dissatisfied with their job; viii) those who are satisfied with their lives do not differ significantly from those who are dissatisfied with their lives; ix) those who are able to accept other individuals are significantly different from those who are unable to accept other individuals; x) those with high sense of anomie do not differ significantly from those with low sense of anomie.

In conclusion, the discriminant and the regression analysis results led to the conclusion that, need for achievement, power motive and acceptance of other people were the only three significant factors in determining managers' disposition towards organizational politics (Refer Table 1).

V. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, three important variables were found significant in affecting managers' disposition towards organizational politics. The three variables are identification of power, acceptance of others and need for achievement. These variables are very crucial in providing valuable information concerning managers' disposition towards organizational politics to organizations as well as to executives and managers.

Zahra (1989) stated that there is a positive relationship between identification of power and disposition towards organizational politics. This means that managers with high identification of power are more likely to have a positive disposition towards organizational politics. As mentioned by McClelland (1979), the need for power status is an important managerial value that serves many useful organizational and individual purposes. This positive association, therefore, raises an interesting issue. Executives or managers who are too entrenched in their organizations and have considerable power status may disapprove of political tactics or political interference that may threaten their status. As these managers recognize the existence of the need for political skills in achieving the formal goals of their organizations and as long as organizational politics does not affect or threaten their status or mission of the organization, they will view organizational politics as something positive or ethical.

Organizations differ in terms of the number of subordinates under one manager's direct supervision. For instance, certain organizational requires some organizations to have a large number of subordinates report directly to only one manager. In this type of organization, a formal relationship is more likely to happen as compared to an informal relationship due to the large number of subordinates. Given the virtual absence of informal relationship, workers tend to compete actively among them to gain attention and favor from their bosses. Similarly, Welsh and Slusher (1986) stated that the larger the number of employees under a manager's direct supervision, the greater the tendency of those with high power motive to play politics. However, the case might be different if the number of employees under a manager's direct supervision

is small. This is due to the fact that the smaller the number of the employees the greater the tendency of an informal relationship between workers and their bosses to be developed, making them less likely to play politics.

In addition, as span of control which relates to the number of employees reporting to a supervisor increases, the amount of attention a supervisor is able to devote to each employee will decrease. This kind of situation may cause uncertainty thus those with higher power motive will tend to play politics in order to accomplish their personal gains. As a result, the perception of organizational politics will be higher and predicted to be positively related with organizational politics.

Besides that, the argument was also supported by the centralization of power in an organization. Some organizations are structured in a way that power is decentralized across the various segments of the organization. In a formal setting, Welsh and Slusher (1986) argued that employees with high power motive are less likely to play politics than in an environment with high degree of power concentration. Nevertheless, although this study does not really support this argument, it still concurs with the idea that employees with high power motive are more likely to play politics in an environment with a high degree of centralization than decentralization. In relation to this, if power and control are centralized only at the upper level management as compared to the lower level management, the potential for people playing politics particularly to those with higher power motive will be greater. Therefore, a direct positive relationship between centralization and organizational politics is predicted among those with high power motives.

The finding also shows that there is a positive relationship between need for achievement and disposition towards organizational politics. This suggests that managers with high need for achievement are more likely to play politics than those with a low need for achievement. As employees differ in their need for achievement, some managers are very ambitious and have a large number of goals to be accomplished within a short period of time. While, the others are not so ambitious and have a limited number of goals to be achieved within a given period of time. The reason for the difference, however, is not within the scope of this study. Besides that, this behavioural characteristics of managers as stated by Zahra (1989) is relevant in explaining a manager's disposition towards organizational politics, which is also supported by this study. This implies that the greater a managers' need for achievement, the more likely they are to engage in organizational politics.

In addition, organizational politics is also an important tool for one's survival in the organization besides improving one's status and securing upward mobility and career advancement. This is supported by Ferns and Buckley (1990), Gandz and Murray (1980), Madison et. al (1980), and Markhan, Harlan and Hackett (1987), which stated that job opportunity or career advancement is positively associated with organizational politics. Then, by playing politics, managers' can facilitate and satisfy themselves in their need for achievement. Consequently, managers with a strong need for achievement will have a positive disposition towards organizational politics.

The finding in this study also shows that there is a negative relationship between acceptance of other people and disposition towards organizational politics. This finding implies that managers who are able to accept other individuals will have a negative disposition towards organizational politics. At first, this might seem difficult to comprehend. However, as argued by Zahra

(1989), managers who are able to accept other people are better able to interact with other individuals thus will see no reason to play politics since their good relationship with others is enough to guarantee them in getting their things done. Resulting to this, they will view organizational politics as something negative or an unethical.

In the previous discussion, it shows the similarity between this study and that of Zahra (1989). On the other hand, there are areas in which the results of this study might be differing. Zahra (1989) found that job satisfaction, life satisfaction, anomie, external locus of control, status, independence and self-esteem to be important in affecting managers' disposition towards organizational politics. But, this study does not see any significant relationship between them. One explanation for this is due to the differences in the cultural settings.

As a result, organizations keen to reduce the prevalence of organizational politics should seek for managers (except for acceptance of other people), with low need for achievement, low power motive and high ability to relate well with others. On the other hand, if organizations seek to enhance organizational politics, then managers with higher on those variables should be employed except for acceptance of other people.

Organizations keen to reduce the prevalence of organizational politics should seek for managers with low need for achievement, low power motive and high ability to relate well with others. If on the contrary (except for acceptance of other people), organizations seek to enhance organizational politics, then managers high on those variables should be employed.

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