

# THE ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS AMONG UNIVERSITY FACULTY

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to empirically test the perception of organizational politics among university faculty in the context of Pakistan. It has been seen that quite a few people in universities have reached or climbed to a position to which they do not belong. The study aimed to find out the extent to which politics was involved in their elevation. The plan of the study involved the collection of data about the perception of organizational politics among the university faculty in Karachi. The sample size of 110 faculty members from various higher education institutions was collected. The instrument used for this study was the 15-item Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). The scale includes three sections such as People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down; Agreeing with powerful others is the best alternative in this organization and When it comes to pay raise and promotion decisions, policies are irrelevant. Respondents recorded their views on a 5-point Likert-scale response format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Pearson Correlation Chi square was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result supports the hypothesis that there is an association between powerful political groups and employees' survival in higher education institutions. The study also highlighted the significant relationship between employees' perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion against the prevailing pay and promotion policies in various institutions of higher education. Based on the findings of this study, related global implications and future avenues are discussed.

**Keywords:** perception of organizational politics, powerful political groups, pay and promotion policies,

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have highlighted that organizational politics plays an important role in employees' performance both formal as well as informal (Adams, Ammeter, Treadway, Ferris, Hochwarter, 2002; O'Connor & Morrison, 2001; Valle & Perrew, 2000). The use of politics in an organization is quite common throughout the world and Pakistan is no exception. Politics is something which can perhaps be rated as the top favorite past time of the general public in Pakistan. In this part of the world the word 'politics' has extreme negative connotation. It is mainly because people who are involved in it are considered to be power wielders and are mainly consist of arguably the most corrupt segment of the society. You ask about organizational politics from any employee working for any organization in Pakistan and he/she would tell you of a political incident in which he/she was either directly or indirectly involved. Regardless of the fact that many organizations refuse to accept the presence of politics within their ranks, it is surely practiced in one form or the other. One cannot just become an ostrich by putting one's head in the sand and say that all is well within his/her organization. People view politics as per their perception which is primarily shaped by the kind of experiences they have had at their respective workplace. If they happen to have been negatively affected by politics they would consider it bad and those whose positions were advanced through politics would consider it a positive thing. Employee will leave their organizations to keep away from the "political games". Results show that politics have a horrible impact on

organizational environment. Although a little bit of politics is necessary for the successful and smooth functioning of the team but excess of it is destructive for the entire team or group (Chang, Rosen, and Levy 2009).

The fact that politics does exist in Pakistani organizations also holds true for education institutions. Faculty members have been witnessed progressing to a higher position in their institutions mainly because they were involved in some kind of a political behavior. One of the major tactics to even survive in an organization is to be primarily being part of a powerful group. Many a times a faculty is even forced to leave the job because he/she refused to be part of any political tactic. It has also been witnessed that if among a group of faculty only one faculty is working and the others are not; that one faculty member would become a throne in the eyes of the others and would ultimately become a victim of power politics. The researcher himself has been an eye witness of politics being practiced at the various seats of learning. Hence, the purpose of the study is to examine the perception of organizational politics among faculty members of universities. This study would help identify whether sustaining, climbing higher in a short time, in the hierarchy of a university, is through belongingness or is it through hard work and ability. This research study will look into the presence of politics among university faculty. It will look into the ways that faculty manipulate each other in order to move ahead in an organization or to stay in an organization or even to get a good pay check. In this research study the researcher would look into the perception of organizational politics among the faculty members of various universities in the city of Karachi. It has been seen that quite a few people in universities have reached or climbed to a position to which they do not belong. The study would aim to find out the extent to which politics are involved in their elevation.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following were the research questions:

1. To what extent are people involved in politics in an organization?
2. To what extent does the idea of going along with others affect excelling in an organization?
3. How far does an organization follow its policies regarding pay?
4. How far does an organization follow its policies regarding promotion?

## 3. HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

- There is an association between powerful political groups and employees survival in higher education institutions.
- There is a significant relationship between employees perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion and the stated pay and promotion policies in higher education institutions.

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of researchers have done their best to define the term 'politics' (Cropanzano, Kacmar and Bozeman, 1995, Ferris, Russ and Fandt, 1989). Doldor (2007) gave an explanation regarding the difficulty faced in defining the term 'politics'. He says that one reason for this is perhaps an increase in the terminologies people use interchangeably for it such as: political environment, political tactics, influence tactics, and political pressure behavior etc. Hence it is difficult to have a commonly acceptable definition for the term politics. A thorough examination of contemporary literature by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) has produced three facets of the concept of politics which are common in the literature. These are: general political behavior, it means a person who behaves in a self-serving manner in order to achieve his/her desired goal; go along to get ahead, which means that a person remains silent in order to achieve hi/her desired goal; and finally, pay and promotion policies through which the organization plays its political role (Kacmar and Carlson 1997).

The literature review of this study is structured around the three areas of the Perception of Organizational Politics (PoPs) generated by Kacmar and Ferris (1991): these include (a) general political behavior, (b) go along to get ahead, and (c) pay and promotion policies.

### 4.1 General political behavior

It has been observed that activities and decisions based on opinion would increase in organizations where there are no rule and regulations for guidance ( Drory & Romm, 1990; Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Ferris, Fedor, Chachere & Pandy, 1989; Ferris & King, 1991; Ferris, Russ & Fandt, 1989; Kacmar & Ferris, 1993; Madison, 1980;

Tushman, 1977). It is quite natural that when there are no specific rules and regulation in an organization, the employees have no idea about the kind of behavior that is expected of them and hence they develop their own. When employees or individuals are left to develop their own rules, they end up making rules that are self serving and strengthen the position of the one who makes those rules. Another area that has been affected by this uncertainty, regarding rules and regulation, is the decision making. Drory and Romm (1990) concluded that decision making under doubt has been found to be susceptible to political pressure. It is quite obvious that in the absence of the much needed information for making a decision, the decision makers tend to relay on their own interpretation of the given situation.

A number of researchers have stated that vying for a position in any organization, because sitting on that seat will allow one to get his/her hands on a treasured resource, is for sure to be considered a political behavior (Farrell & Peterson, 1982; Kumar & Ghadially, 1989). Dearth of prized resources for example transfers, raises, office space, budgets etc. breeds rivalry. This clearly shows that an organization with limited resources must be having a political atmosphere. Scarcity of resources can hit any organization; no organization can claim being perfect. It might be deficient in at least one area if not all; hence political activities may take place in almost any organization. Pinpointing the reasons for the shortage of resources can assist in foretelling not only the possible target of political tricks but also how severe that competition may turn out to be. Any personality who has command over important resources that cannot be available somewhere else will be a likely target of political actions (Frost, 1987). In certain cases, employees in an organization may not grapple that fiercely for securing tickets to an event; on the other hand they would fight fiercely for getting a resource treasured by all, such as a raise or a promotion.

Sowmya and Panchanatham (2012) tried to study the association between organizational politics and turnover intention of employees in educational institutions of Chennai, India. This study analyzed the association between the turnover intention and organizational politics. Furthermore the study also analyzed the impact of gender on the intention of turnover among the teachers in the educational institutions. A total of 272 faculty members from engineering colleges in Chennai participated in this study. The findings of the study confirmed the utility of examining the workplace politics in relation to the intention of turnover. The researchers concluded that despite the fact that the faculty belongs to the teaching profession, they are too are affected by the feelings of work place politics.

Nayyer and Raja (2012) focuses on the impact of impression management on the intensity of organizational politics. The researchers stated that the level of organizational politics and impression management varies with employees' gender and the structure of the organization. The sample of the study consisted of 300 employees of the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. The researchers concluded that despite the fact that organizations have a built in political environment, the management can take certain steps to reduce the negative outcomes of politics. These steps include: Managers should ensure the streamlining of the communication channels, connecting compensation with performance and ensuring that decision making is done with justice; it is the job of the managers to identify the negative political behavior of their staff and with assertive management tactics should be able to tackle such employees.

## 4.2 Go along to get ahead

Conflict is always linked to organizational politics in the literature (Frost, 1987; Gandz & Murray, 1980; Mintzberg, 1985). The major reason for this link is that political behavior is self-serving, and hence it has the potential to threaten the self-interests of others. Conflict occurs when someone responds to a threat (Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981). Drory and Romm (1990) stated that the presence of conflict is an important undercurrent of organizational politics. In order to avoid conflict some individuals would end up not resisting those who aspire to influence others. It may sound a neutral act; however this act could go down as a form of political behavior. It has been stated that it is the intent that forms the basis for a political or non-political behavior in organizations. It means that if a person is acting in a particular behavior in order to further his own cause, then that person is acting politically (Frost, 1987). A person who is not rocking the boat is not viewed as a possible threat by those who are acting politically. Such a person is welcomed by the political group and is rewarded for not interfering in the affairs of the politically motivated group. Hence, by not taking any action or by going along to get ahead can be a wise approach to take to further one's own goal and desires while working in a political atmosphere.

A study, conducted by Bodla, Danish and Nawaz (2012), attempts to examine the arbitrating function of organizational politics between the employees' moral and their job characteristics. The job characteristics considered during the study were job ambiguity, skill variety, feedback and autonomy, where as morale was a combination of job satisfaction and affective commitment. The finding of the study was based on the sample data collected nationwide, from a number of sectors, with the help of a questionnaire. A total of 577 respondents participated in this study. The researchers concluded in their study that in order to enable employees to perform their on the job role, the management should brief them regarding its expectations of them in terms of their rights, duties, and tasks. It must be clearly communicated to the employees that how they could carry out their duties by following certain hierarchy and chain of command.

### 4.3 Pay and promotion policies

The third and last type of PoPs is the way organizations reward and hence, are responsible for the political behavior of its employees through policy implementation (Ferris, Fedor, Chachere & Pondy, 1989; Ferris & King, 1991; Kacmar & Ferris, 1993). Kacmar and Carlson (1997) stated that although the decision makers might not be doing it consciously, it's the way the HR policies and systems that are developed and practiced that reward the individual having political behavior and punish those who do not get involved in influence tactics. Such an attitude of the management will definitely result in a tradition where political activities will be considered routine thing in almost all the human resource facets of the organizations. Individually oriented activity, compared to organizationally oriented activity, is usually self-centered and political in character. When such an attitude is reinforced either in the form of a reward or a promotion, this form of attitude will most likely be repeated. Therefore, organizations may develop atmospheres that promote and reward political behavior. Rewarding political tactics can also affect those who are not used to acting politically. When individuals see others, who are involved in organizational politics, being rewarded better than them; they are likely to be involved in political behavior in future (Ferris, Russ & Fandt, 1989; Kacmar & Ferris, 1993).

Gull and Zaidi conducted a research study in 2012 to highlight the impact of organizational politics on the level of employees' job satisfaction in Lahore, Pakistan. Their study brought to the fore effect of organizational politics on the job satisfaction level of the employees. The study took into account a sample size of 250 employees working in the health sector. The study brought to the fore the inverse connection among perception of organizational politics and job satisfaction. It simply shows that when the perception about politics is on a higher level, the job satisfaction level would be low and vice versa. Gull and Zaidi (2012) emphasized that the management should streamline the working of their human resource in such a way that it ensures that politics do not become destructive. The management should get the services of organizational psychologist to help highlight and take care of institutional troubles. Hence, the management should realize the needs of its employees and must work for the betterment of the environment of the organization. The management should come up with a manual periodically which would enable supervisors to take remedial steps on time (Gull & Zaidi, 2012).

## 5. METHODOLOGY

In modern times, most surveys use a sample of members to measure population characteristics, as in this definition by Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer (2004): "The survey is a systematic method for gathering information from a sample of entities for the purpose of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members." Through survey research the relevant research problems are transmitted to the questionnaire. The participants then filled in these questionnaires. The data obtained through the questionnaires is used for measuring different variables through which the participants have shared their past experiences and behaviors. Thus the entire process allows the researcher to have a better picture of the personality of the participants. The measured traits are then presented in the form of frequency distribution, rate and occurrence. The major reason for choosing to use the survey method for the collection of data was that the researcher was looking into the frequency of a number of factors that are involved in the perception of politics among faculty members. The plan of the study involved the collection of data about the perception of organizational politics among the university faculty in Karachi.

## 5.1 Sample

Keeping in view the topic of the research, the researcher chose purposive sampling method which means that the participant would be the very people who have experienced the phenomenon first hand. Hence, the perception of organizational politics among university faculty was looked at by collecting the data from 200 full time university faculty members who had a minimum of three years of experience. Out of 200 questionnaires a total of 110 duly filled questionnaires were received.

## 5.2 Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the 15-item Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). The scale includes items such as 'People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down'; 'Agreeing with powerful others is the best alternative in this organization.' and 'When it comes to pay raise and promotion decisions, policies are irrelevant.' Respondents recorded their views on each statement on a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), not sure (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The data thus collected is sorted out and was analyzed using SPSS 17.

## 6. ANALYSIS

The instrument was divided into two sections. Section one was demographic which consisted of seven questions and section two consisted of 15 items proposed by Kacmar and Carlson. The demographic section of the tool indicated that out of the 110 respondents 62% are male while 38% are female. Most of the respondents' i.e., 44.5% are between the ages of 36-45 years. Respondents between the ages of 25-35 years were 22.7%. Similarly 19.1% are between the ages of 46-55 years, while 5.5% respondents are between the ages of 65 and above years. 50.9% are masters degree holders, 41.8% are M.Phil, while 1.8% are PhDs. Of the given sample 60% are lecturers, 27.3% respondents are assistant professors, 10.9% in associate professors, while 1.8% in professors. Of the 110 respondents 24.5% have a job experience of less than 5 year, the highest percentage of experience, that is, 37.3% is between 11-15 years, 15.5% have experience between 6-10 years, while, 12.7% have job experience above 21years. 89.1% participants are full time employees, whereas, 10.9% are contractual. 40% participants are drawing a monthly salary of over 71,000, while 16.4% are drawing a salary 30,000 to 40,000.

**Hypothesis 1.** There is an association between powerful political groups and employees survival in a higher education institution.

**Table 1**  
**Powerful Political Groups \* Employees Survival Cross-tabulation**

		Employees Survival				Total
		Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Powerful Political Groups	Strongly Disagree	0	2	4	0	6
	Disagree	2	18	29	2	51
	Not Sure	9	23	5	0	37
	Agree	4	4	2	0	10
	Strongly Agree	6	0	0	0	6
Total		21	47	40	2	110

**Table 2**  
**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	55.276 <sup>a</sup>	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	54.227	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	35.763	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	110		

Table 2 describes the high two-tailed significant correlation between powerful political groups at the work place and employees survival at the work place with n=110 participants against a two-tailed probability distribution with 95% confidence interval. In this case we have a chi-square of 55.256, with 1 degree of freedom [ $df = (2-1)(2-1) = 1$ ], which is significant at least at the 0.05 alpha level. Hence, we accept the hypothesis that there is an association between powerful political groups and employees survival in a higher education institution.

**Hypothesis 2.** There is a significant relationship between employees perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion and the stated pay and promotion policies in a higher education institution.

**Table3**  
**Employees perceived satisfaction regarding Pay and Promotion \* The stated pay and promotion policies**  
**Cross-tabulation**

		The stated pay and promotion policies					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Employees satisfaction regarding Pay and Promotion	Strongly Disagree	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Disagree	0	15	13	4	0	32
	Not Sure	0	20	10	16	5	51
	Agree	2	4	3	14	0	23
	Strongly Agree	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total		2	39	28	34	7	110

**Table 4**  
**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	65.886 <sup>a</sup>	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	48.918	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.208	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	110		

Table 4 describes the high two-tailed significant correlation relationship between employees satisfaction regarding pay and promotion and the stated pay and promotion policies in a higher education institution. With n=110 the chi square is 65.886 with alpha 0.05 which is considerably significant to be concomitant at 95%

confidence interval for the study to be effective. Therefore, we conclude that there is a significant relationship between employees' perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion policies in a higher education institution.

## 7. DISCUSSION

The analysis of hypothesis 1 brought to the fore an association between powerful political groups and employees survival in higher education institutions. This means that there is a strong sense of politics that exists even in higher education institutions. As stated earlier in the literature review also that politics exists everywhere including the seats of learning. A number of people seem to negate this fact but it does exist. Studies have shown that there is a positive association between perception of organizational politics and workplace friendship (Ofoegbu, Akanbi & Alhanolu, 2012). One has to side with a powerful group in order to survive otherwise a loner seems to have no chance of survival. An employee who does not stand with a powerful group will ultimately lose his job. Sowmya and Panchanatham (2012) in their study confirmed the utility of examining the workplace politics in relation to the intention of turnover. The researchers concluded that despite being in the teaching profession the faculty is also captured by a strong sense of work place politics. A number of studies have observed that politics exists among employees regardless of age, gender, income etc. The studies also concluded that politics cannot be completely eliminated from the work place; rather one has to learn to live with it. Educational institutions also have a strong sense of hierarchy but it is not as multifaceted as in the business world. The faculty, though, is controlled by the management, they directly report to their immediate heads. The heads should make sure to provide an environment free from biases to the subordinates in order to minimize the causes of politics due to the influence of the superiors. Byrne (2005) concluded that the perception of organizational politics has negative work outcomes and is harmful for employees as well as for organization.

Kacmar (1997) argued that dearth of prized resources for example transfers, raises, office space, and budgets breeds rivalry. Scarcity of resources can hit any organization; no organization can claim being perfect. It might be deficient in at least one area if not all; hence political activities may take place in almost any organization. This clearly shows that an organization with limited resources must be having a political atmosphere. Thus in our part of the world, most of the institutions seem to have a built in political environment and employees mostly become victims of such an environment. If only the management could take steps to oversee such an environment; a number of employees might be able to survive and would stay with that institution for a longer period. Nayyer and Raja (2012) in their study focuses on the impact of impression management on the level of organizational politics. Their study also concluded that despite the fact that organizations have a built in political environment, the management can take certain steps to reduce the negative outcomes of politics.

The analysis of Hypothesis 2 highlighted that there is a significant relationship between employees perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion and the stated pay and promotion policies in a higher education institution. It shows that the more an institution follows its policies regarding pay and promotion, the more satisfied would be its employees. If an institution is going against its stated pay and promotion policies then it is definitely breeding a political environment. In such a situation the employees are most likely to become disenchanted and would tend to give little importance to the management policies regarding pay and promotion. The attitude of the management also cast a doubt on the various promotions and increments that are given to the employees. It is quite possible that the management may not be doing it intentionally but rather it is the way the HR policies are made that gives leverage to those who wield political power. As stated earlier in the literature review by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) that although the decision makers might not be doing it consciously, it's the way the HR policies and systems that are developed and practiced that reward the individual having political behavior and punish those who do not get involved in influence tactics. Hence when a political attitude is rewarded in the form of a promotion or pay increase, that attitude is reinforced and is repeated time and again.

Working in such a politically oriented institution become really hard for those employees, who would rather concentrate on the given work rather than becoming part of the political tactics. Gull and Zaidi (2012) concluded that the opinion of employees about other's self-centered behavior like treatment of supervisory policies is negatively linked to the work enjoyment level of the workforce. They advised that the top management should

fine-tune their human resource practices so that politics do not get nasty in their respective organizations. In fact organizations should hire the services of organizational experts in order to help them identify and handle such politics related problems in their organizations. Hence the organizations must understand the wants of the workers and should take steps for the improvement of the organizational environment. It is also advised that the management development program from time to time for managers in order for them to better understand the political environment and hence to take correct decisions on time. In short the result showed that the effect of pay and promotion policy on the employees perceived satisfaction pay and promotion was significant. The implication of this significance is that employees tend to be more satisfied with their jobs when they get a pay and promotion according to their potentials and also when the pay promotion policies of the firm are in their favor.

## 8. CONCLUSION

It is concluded from this study that politics does exist at the higher education level and that seats of learning are no exception when it comes to politics; faculty members do behave the same as employees in other institution. The management of the higher education institutions could take stock of this situation and could better manage their respective institution by streamlining their policies, especially their human resource policies. Research work by Vigoda-Gadot (2003) concluded that employees considered politics at the office as a means to achieve personal gains at the cost of other employees even if that gain was at the cost of the whole organization. The study also brought to the fore a strong association between employees perceived satisfaction regarding pay and promotion and institutions' pay and promotion policies. The management of the higher education institutions could take stock of this situation and could better manage their respective institutions by streamlining their policies, especially their human resource policies. Based on the findings, it is also suggested that the faculty members should try to understand and counter strategically the general political behavior in their institutions to maximize their satisfaction and reduce the frequency of frustration.

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