

Organizational Politics, Psychological Empowerment And Organizational Commitment: Empirical Evidence From Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Despite its ubiquity in organizations, organizational politics may be viewed negatively by managers. When managers empower employees, the effect of organizational politics may be moderated. This study of Pakistani managers (n=357) demonstrates that organizational politics changes from having a negative effect on employee commitment to a strong positive effect when employees perceive psychological empowerment. The study also validates the use of existing measurement scales in non-Western cultures.

Keywords: Organizational Commitment; Organizational Politics; Psychological Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Including organizational commitment as a major employee attitude construct has advanced management understanding in a wide range of workplace behavior. Organizational commitment has been strongly linked to organizational citizenship (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003), firm growth and performance (Antoncic & Antoncic, 2011), as well as turnover and absenteeism (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988). While the overriding trend has been to identify positive outcomes of employee commitment, there are empirical studies linking cost and time overruns in over 40 percent of all information technology projects (Desai & Chulkov, 2009; Smith & Keil, 2003) to unmanaged commitment escalation. Sunk costs and identification of personal responsibility are two explanations of individual cognitions that have been associated with commitment failures (Desai & Chulkov, 2009; Smith & Keil, 2003). Taken together, the positive behaviors and dysfunctions show that organizational commitment can be a key force in directing employee work outcomes.

Consideration of organizational politics rests somewhere between required role behavior and unsanctioned efforts (Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001). Political behavior is often an attempt to influence the distribution of resources and outcomes in the organization (Sussman, Adams, Kuzmits, & Raho, 2002) which can, in turn, have substantial impact on the development and maintenance of organizational commitment. Studies indicate political behavior in organizations is typically perceived as non-sanctioned, manipulative, self-interested and is often construed negatively (Poon, 2003; Vigoda, 2000a, 2000b). Alternatively, others have argued that well managed political skills can positively influence work outcomes (Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005), especially information sharing (Gupta, 2011). The key to understanding how politics influences organizational commitment is focusing on the employee subjective experience of politics (Gandz & Murrey, 1980; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). Focusing on the perceptions of organizational politics refines the notion of organizational politics making it an individual, perceptual and subjective construct with proximal cognitive access to the development of individual attitudes, such as organizational commitment.

A known moderator of organizational contextual factors is individual psychological empowerment (Avolio, Zhu, Kho, & Bhata, 2004). The empowerment concept (Spreitzer, 1995) has proven to be a useful and sophisticated construct producing both a micro-perspective focusing on concepts; for example, self-efficacy and meaningfulness, and a macro-perspective focusing on delegation of decision-making and information sharing. As the research has evolved (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Moye, Henkin, & Egley, 2004; Ergeneli, Sag, Ari, & Metin, 2007), a four-dimensional model of empowerment focusing on competence, meaning, impact and self-determination has become standard.

The necessity of testing the moderators for the political behavior/organizational commitment relationship has emerged in prior research. Specifically referencing Pakistan and referring generally to developing organizations, one study (Bodla & Hussain, 2010) cites the need for effective leadership styles to manage employees. This study also notes the need to generalize managerial theory to non-Western work organizations. Further, a study of transformational leadership in Singapore (Avolio, Zhu, Kho, & Bhata, 2004) demonstrated that psychological empowerment was an important moderator for organizational commitment.

HYPOTHESES

- H1** Perceptions of organizational politics are negatively associated with organizational commitment.
- H2** Higher levels of psychological empowerment are associated with lower levels of perceived organizational politics.
- H3** Increased levels of psychological empowerment moderate the relationship between organizational politics and organizational commitment.

METHODS

Sample

The obtained sample (N=357) is of employed persons who are part-time graduate students of economics or business. Data were collected at five universities in Pakistan - three in Lahore and two in Islamabad. The sample is 70.9 percent male with 46.1 percent under age 40. The respondents report themselves as 11.8 percent upper management, 43.7 percent middle management, 25.8 percent first level management and 18.8 percent workforce. Fifty-five percent of the respondents have five years or less experience and 26.1 percent have more than ten years experience. The largest category was 20,000 to 60,000 rupees per month income. The exchange rate of rupees to dollars is approximately 85 to 1.

Measures

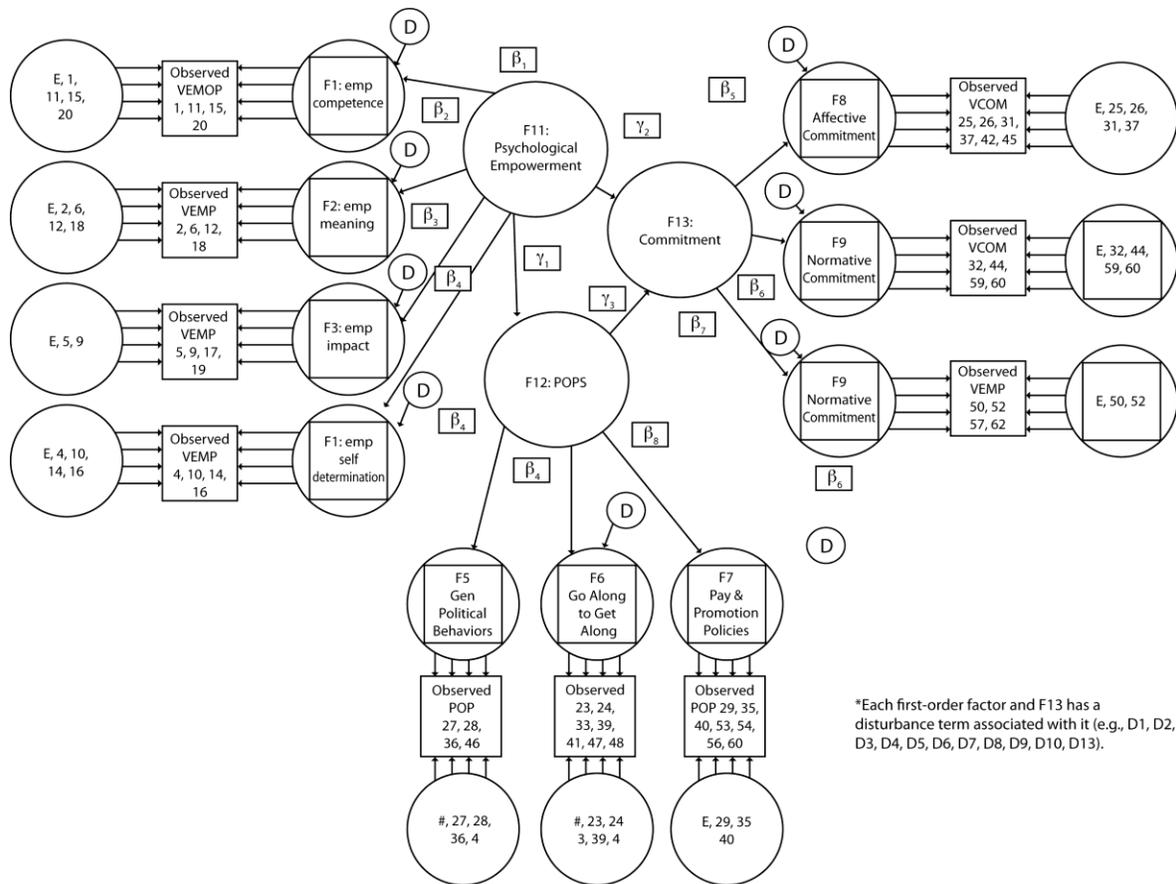
Organizational commitment is measured using the 14-item scale with three documented subscales (Allen & Meyer, 1990) - affective commitment (six items; "I would be happy to spend the rest of my career"), normative commitment (four items; "This organization deserves my loyalty"), and continuance commitment (four items; "Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity). The measure of organizational politics uses 18 items and focuses on three dimensions - political behavior ("People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down"), going along to get along ("Agreeing with powerful others is the best alternative"), and pay and promotion policies ("Promotions around here are not valued much because how they are determined is so political"). The items were selected from surveys of the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). The 16-item psychological empowerment scale has four dimensions - competence ("I am really confident about my ability to do the job"), meaning ("My job activities are personally meaningful to me."), impact (e.g. "I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department"), and self-determination ("I can decide on my own how to go about doing my own work"). All questionnaires were presented in English (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS

The measures of the three variables of interest – organizational commitment, organizational politics, and psychological empowerment - were subjected to first order confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling to test validity of the measurement as applied in a non-Western culture. The applications of structural equation modeling were executed using the EQS/Window program (Bentler, 1989, 1992). Four criteria for assessing fit were used: X^2 , X^2/df , the probability of the X^2/df measure, and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). The X^2/df measure was utilized to balance the impact of sample size on significance. Ideally, values should be below 3.0. The comparative fit index was included to test acceptability of covariation within the data set with values greater than .90 indicating acceptable fit to the data.

All three concepts, based on extensive prior research, met expectations of the confirmatory factor analysis. For organizational commitment, its three dimensions produced well-balanced factor loadings. The X^2 (Chi square)=295.14, $X^2/df=2.19$, $p>.001$ and the comparative fit indices were all greater than .9. For the organizational politics measure, the $X^2=777.0$, the $X^2/df=1.44$, $p>.001$ and all CFI were greater than .9. For the psychological empowerment index, the $X^2=13.79$, $X^2/df=1.38$, $p>.03$ and all loadings $p>.9$. Figure 1 presents the full, second order structural equation model with EQS notations.

Figure 1: Full Structural Equation Model with EQS Notation



*Each first-order factor and F13 has a disturbance term associated with it (e.g., D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, D8, D9, D10, D13).

TESTING MODERATOR EFFECTS

Figure 2 displays a structural equation model where organizational politics is regressed onto organizational commitment. The test statistics are: $X^2=202.7$, the $X^2/df=2.20$, $p<.05$. The beta coefficient for this relationship is $-.966$. Simply stated, in this sample there is a significant negative direct effect for organizational politics on organizational commitment.

Figure 2: Relationship Between Politics and Commitment

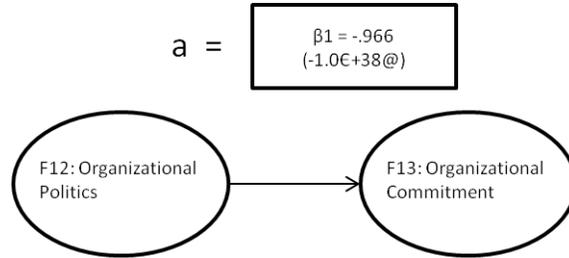
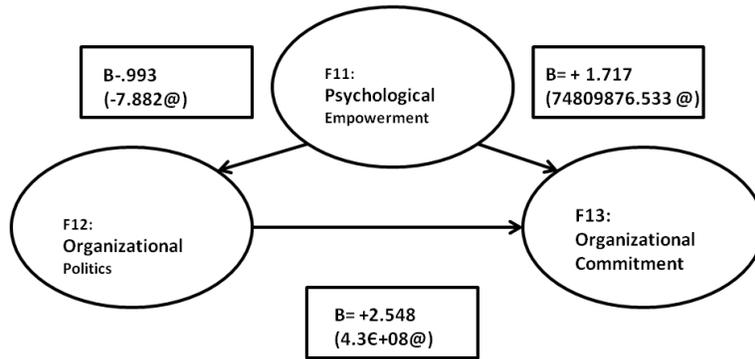


Figure 3 presents a larger structural equation model that includes psychological empowerment as a possible moderator between organizational politics and organizational commitment. Again, the test statistics are: $X^2=493.10$, $X^2/df=1.98$, all betas are significant at $p>.05$. Most interestingly, the beta for the politics on commitment relation is now positive 2.548 . These findings support the notion that psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between organizational politics and organizational commitment.

Figure 3: How Empowerment Moderates the Politics/Commitment Relationship



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The forgoing data support all three hypotheses – organizational commitment is impacted by organizational politics and psychological empowerment. More specifically, psychological empowerment positively moderates the relationship between politics and commitment. These effects strongly support management and leadership styles, providing increases in employee autonomy, perceived meaningfulness of work, perceived self-efficacy and impact of employees’ work within the organization. Further, these findings suggest, in a very initial way, that existing social psychological theories of employee organizational relationships may be applicable in non-Western work cultures.

Organizational commitment is recognized as a key employee attitude. It has positive benefits across an array of outcomes and, only occasionally, adverse potential, as in the cases of unwarranted escalation of information system projects. Focusing on organizational politics appears to be a fruitful and growing perspective. This research supports and clarifies managers' understanding of organizational politics. Politics may be viewed and, indeed, may have non-sanctioned and negatively perceived dimensions. When psychological empowerment develops among employees, organizational politics can be a positive force in organizations.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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