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AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CORRELATES OF PERCEPTIONS OF COMPANY POLITICS*

Shaker A. Zahra and Paul J. Champagne

Many earlier writers who addressed the issues surrounding organizational politics (OP) tended to focus on its potentially negative impact in terms of morale, performance, group cohesion, and organizational effectiveness (e.g., Gandz & Murray, 1980; Gemmill & Heisler, 1972; Piffifferner & Sherwood, 1960; Robbins, 1976). However, with the growing realization that organizations are political entities (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Tushman, 1977; Schein, 1980; Zaleznik, 1970), there has been a marked shift in attitudes regarding OP and the morality of politicking. For example, Cavanaugh, Moberg, and Valesquez (1981) have developed a decision tree designed to help determine whether or not the use of a given political behavior is ethically just.

A central feature of OP research has been the effort to identify organizational factors which give rise to politicking. It has been suggested that struggles over resource allocation (Miles, 1980), conflicts over policy preferences (Wamsley & Zald, 1973), and uncertainty surrounding tasks (Tushman 1977) tend to intensify politicking. Tushman (1977) has also noted that the political process is not the result of individual or group perversity, but rather is due to the very nature of organizations. Politicking is inevitable because of the pyramid shaped hierarchy common to organizations which restricts opportunities for upward mobility to higher levels of management. It is further intensified by the subjective nature of the process used to select and promote top managers (Gemmill & Heisler, 1973; Larwood, Radford & Berger, 1980). Finally, Robbins (1976) has noted that performance appraisal and the distribution of organizational rewards also tend to encourage politicking.

Still, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the propensity to engage in OP is simply the result of organizational factors. An additional research points out that a variety of personality traits also play a crucial role. In a study of 97 managers, Allen et al. (1979), depicted organizational politicians as articulate, sensitive, socially adept, competent, popular, extroverted, self-confident, aggressive, ambitious, devious, "organization man," highly intelligent, and logical. Moberg (1978) found that locus of control also is an important consideration in explaining one's propensity toward OP, and he suggests that personal values such as solipsism,

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materialism, and social recognition affect OP. Finally, Madison et al. (1980) argue that one's concern with status is an important determinant of propensity toward politicking.

Clearly, then, organizational politics (OP) have become an increasingly important research topic. Yet, despite the fact that there has been a good deal of writing in this area, little effort has been made to isolate theoretically meaningful correlates of politicking or develop a reliable research instrument for assessing perceptions of OP. The current study attempts to address both of these problems by examining the relationship between social background, personality, work experience and perceptions of OP. It utilizes several previously developed measures as well as a number of new items.

Method

Sample. The questionnaire used to collect the data was mailed to 150 managers in several organizations in a southeastern state. It was accompanied by a letter which explained the purpose of the study, solicited the participation of potential respondents, and assured their confidentiality. A total of 101 questionnaires were returned of which 97 were useable, i.e., 65% response rate.

The majority of the respondents (70.1%) are male. The average age of the sample is 40.9 (SD=12.4) years. The average education is 16.2 (SD=3.6) years. The average full-time experience is 17.4 (SD=11.5) years. Approximately 64% of the respondents indicated that they have worked with one company since graduation, 23.7% with two companies, 5.2% with three companies, and 3% with four or more companies. The majority of the respondents (61.9%) work for service oriented firms compared to 24.7% and 5.2% who work for manufacturing and retailing organizations, respectively. Approximately 60% of these organizations employ less than 500 employees. As to current position, 15.5% of the respondents indicated that they are non-managerial employees, 24.7% lower-level managers, 28.9% middle managers, and 29.9% top managers.

Measures. The first section of the questionnaire included measures of select personality traits. The second section included a measure of locus of control. The third section included eleven items which measured perceptions of OP. The fourth section included several demographic and background variables. The following is a brief overview of the measures used.

1. *Concern with status.* Kaufman's (1957) Status-Concern Scale was used to measure attitudes towards status and mobility, i.e., the importance of status symbols and their attainment to the individual. The scale consists of ten items which follow a six point

response format. An example item is: "Ambition is the most important factor in determining success in life." Acceptable psychometric properties such as reliability and validity of the scale are reported by Kaufman (1957). In the present study, the scale had a coefficient alpha of .81.

2. *Locus of control.* As proposed by Rotter (1966), locus of control refers to one's belief as to the source of control over one's life. Accordingly, two groups of individuals are identified: internalists and externalists. The former tend to believe that their lives are determined by a force from within, whereas the latter subscribe to the notion that some other force dominates and shapes their lives. In this study, Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (1966) was used to examine this important personality variable. It consists of 23 question pairs, using a forced-choice format, plus six "filler" questions. The scale had a coefficient alpha of .69 in the current study.
3. *Personal Values.* The Personal Values Scale, developed and validated by Scott (1966), was used to measure important values including intellectualism (4 items), kindness (4 items), social skills (4 items), loyalty (3 items), honesty (4 items), religiousness (5 items), self-control (4 items), creativity (4 items), and independence (3 items). The scales emphasize a three point response format: "Always admire," "Depends on the situation," and "Always dislike." Examples of the items are: "Being poised, gracious, and charming under all circumstances" (social skills), "Turning the other cheek, and forgiving others when they harm you" (kindness), and "Always living one's religion in his daily life" (religiousness). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the subscales. Accordingly, alpha coefficients relating to the forementioned dimensions are: .66 (intellectualism), .64 (kindness), .70 (social skills), .65 (loyalty), .61 (honesty), .73 (religiousness), .63 (self-control), .62 (creativity), and .61 (independence).
4. *Perceptions of OP.* Eleven items were developed and used to tap the respondents' perceptions of OP. This was deemed necessary because of the diversity of methods used in this regard, and the general lack of reliability of existing "instruments." The items were pretested in a classroom setting in a major state university in a southeastern state. The purpose of the pretest was to articulate item wording and refine the scale used. The response format followed a 7-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (coded 1) to "strongly agree" (coded 7). Factor analysis was then used to examine the underlying dimensions among the eleven items. Varimax Orthogonal rotation was used and two factors resulted. The first contained six items and had an eigenvalue of 1.74; two items did not factor out on either dimension. Table 1 presents the results of factor analysis and the items relating to each factor.

TABLE 1
Results of Factor Analysis

Items ^(a)	Factors		h ²
	1 (POP)	2 (PSUS)	
1. <u>Perceptions of OP (POP) Factor</u>			
(2) Work politics is unethical.	<u>.57</u>	.32	.43
(3) Playing office politics is immoral.	<u>.64</u>	.21	.45
(5) Politicking is harmful to the organization	<u>.79</u>	.28	.70
(6) Politicking could threaten organizational goal accomplishment.	<u>.74</u>	.37	.68
(8) There is nothing an organization could gain from people playing politics.	<u>.69</u>	.33	.59
(9) Company politicians have no integrity.	<u>.81</u>	.36	.79
2. <u>Politicking-Success (PSUS) Factor:</u>			
(1) To succeed in life, one has to play the game.	<u>.11</u>	<u>.71</u>	.52
(4) To advance his/her career, one has to play politics.	<u>.21</u>	<u>.49</u>	.28
(7) Successful executives are good company politicians.	.26	<u>.63</u>	.46
Eigenvalue	3.16	1.74	4.90
% of Variance	61	28	89

(a) Eleven items were entered in the analysis but nine met the cut-off loading criterion of $\geq .40$. Numbers next to items refer to their sequence in the questionnaire.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the items included in the first factor clearly relate to negative perceptions of organizational politics. Therefore, the first factor was labeled "perception of organizational politics" (POP). The second factor, however, relates to positive views of politics. Specifically, the three items appear to relate to the effect of politicking on success in an organizational setting in general. Hence, this factor was labeled "politicking-success," hereafter, PSUS. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the two dimensions. The POP dimension has a coefficient alpha of .79 while the PSUS dimension has a coefficient alpha of .67.

5. *Background, Demographic, and Work-Related Variables.* Self reports were used to collect data regarding the sex, age, education, and marital status of the respondents. Data relating to the number of companies worked with since graduation, number of promotions received within the past three years, years of full-time work, and the size of company (i.e., number of employees) were also collected.

Analysis and Results

Negative Perceptions of Organizational Politicking (POP):

Pearson's product moment correlations between individual (background and demographic), personality, and organizational factors and perceptions of organizational politics were examined. The results are presented in Table 2.

Focusing on individual variables, Table 2 shows that older respondents seem to hold less negative views of OP ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$) than other employees. Better educated employees are also likely to hold less negative perceptions of OP than other employees ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$). However, sex and marital status are not significantly associated with POP. Table 2 also shows that the number of companies the employee has worked with since graduation is negatively associated with POP ($r = -.18$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, the number of promotions received, years of full-time experience, and current position (managerial vs. nonmanagerial) are not associated with POP at a significant level.

With regard to company related factors, Table 2 shows that the type of organization and its size are not significantly associated with POP. These results validate prior research which has indicated that OP is prevalent in all organizations, irrespective of their size or the type of business in which the firm is engaged.

TABLE 2
Correlates of POP and PSUS

Variables	POP	PSUS
Age	-.17**	.02
Sex	.12	.06
Education (years)	-.31****	.24**
Marital Status	-.11	-.03
No. of companies worked for	-.18**	.15*
No. of promotions	.07	.01
Years of full time work	.11	.20**
Size	-.02	.06
Current position	.03	.06
Type of organization	.01	.13*
Intellectualism	.12	-.05
Kindness	-.02	.20**
Social Skills	.10	-.08
Loyalty	.14*	-.06
Status	.15*	-.19**
Honesty	.05	.05
Religiousness	-.02	.19**
Self Control	.05	.12
Creativity	.03	-.08
Independence	.01	.08
Locus of control	-.15*	.03

(*) $p < .10$

(**) $p < .05$

(***) $p < .01$

Table 2 shows the correlations between eleven personality dimensions and POP. As Table 2 indicates, the relationship between status, loyalty, locus of control and POP is significant but at only a marginal level ($p < .10$). In terms of locus of control, externalists are less likely to hold negative perceptions of OP ($r = -.15$, $p < .10$) than are internalists.

The Perceived Relationship Between Politicking-Success (PSUS):

Table 2 also shows the results of Pearson's product moment correlations between individual, personality, and organizational variables and PSUS. Age, sex, marital status, and number of promotions are not significantly associated with PSUS. However, as Table 2 indicates, education is positively correlated ($r = .24, p < .01$). The number of companies the respondent has worked for is also correlated with PSUS ($r = .15, p < .10$). Years of full-time experience, on the other hand, are negatively associated ($r = -.20, p < .05$). Finally current job classification (managerial vs. nonmanagerial) is not significantly correlated with PSUS at an acceptable level.

In terms of the organizational variables, Table 2 indicates that the size of the organization is not related to PSUS, whereas the type of business is significantly associated with this variable ($r = .13, p < .10$).

Three personality variables are associated with PSUS (see Table 2). They are kindness ($r = .20, p < .05$), status ($r = -.19, p < .05$), and religiousness ($r = .19, p < .05$).

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to identify salient correlates of perceptions or organizational politics (OP). The analysis focused on individual (background), personality, and company-related considerations. The results presented in this paper (see Table 2) suggest that correlates of OP relate mainly to background and personality factors. Organizational variables were found to be insignificant. Work experience, on the other hand, seems to be of special importance in developing one's views of OP. For example, the number of companies worked for since graduation is negatively associated with POP, indicating an increased tolerance of OP-behavior as one's experience is expanded. In fact, the results presented in Table 2 clearly show that this tolerance is extended to a belief that politicking is a major criterion of success in organizational life. This is evidenced by the significant correlation between the number of companies worked for and PSUS ($r = .15, p < .10$). Note also that the number of years of full-time experience is positively associated with PSUS ($r = .20, p < .05$), which reaffirms the respondents' propensity to believe that OP is an important determinant of success in organizations.

The results presented in this paper indicate that the personality correlates of POP and PSUS are different (see Table 2). As stated earlier, concern with status, loyalty, and external locus of control are associated with POP. It appears, at least within the context of this sample, that individuals who exhibit loyalty are more likely to hold negative views of OP (POP), and are less likely to believe that politicking leads to success in corporate life. The consistency of these views across the two dimensions examined here (i.e., POP and PSUS) may imply that individuals who place their loyalties in the

organization and abide by the formal rules and procedures tend to perceive any deviations from these standards in a negative fashion.

The results regarding the association between concern with status and PSUS ($r = -.19, p < .05$) are inconsistent with earlier research. Also, as Table 2 demonstrates, it appears that these respondents hold negative views of the ethics of OP (POP). Since prior research does not provide a compelling rationale for the concern with status-POP, or status-PSUS relationships, it is plausible to suggest that such individuals may rely on more conventional means to achieve success. An examination of the scale items supports this tentative explanation. Among the three items used to measure the concern with status trait are "Gaining recognition for one's achievement," and "Being in a position to direct and mold others' lives." With this in mind, managers with high concern for status are less likely to revert to OP-behaviors to achieve success, but may emphasize a distinguished record of accomplishment as a means of achieving the desired status.

The result relating to locus of control (see Table 2) is consistent with previous views of politicking. The result appears in line with the definition of the externalist personality provided by Rotter (1966). An externalist is more disposed to rely on manipulative means to achieve goals while justifying such behaviors based on general stereotypes (e.g., everybody else does it) or may develop a sense that he/she was driven to use such behaviors.

A surprising result reported in Table 2 is the positive correlation between religiousness and the perceived relationship between politicking and success (PSUS). A caveat is in order, however. An examination of the correlation between Scott's Value Subscales used here indicated that there is a strong positive intercorrelation ($r = .62, p < .001$) between religiousness and kindness. This observation raises some doubt as to the unique domain each of the "kindness" and "religiousness" measures and, of course, their corresponding discriminative validities. Therefore, the results reported in conjunction with religiousness and kindness must be interpreted with caution.

Conclusion

Two conclusions emerge from the current investigation. The first conclusion is that the correlates of POP and PSUS are different. The second conclusion is that background and personality factors constitute the more important correlates of OP.

The results reported here should be considered tentative. Much more research is needed to validate the findings presented in this paper. Future researchers are urged to address some of the following issues if meaningful generalizations are to be made regarding OP in contemporary work settings. First, there is a need to develop a reliable and valid instrument to measure perceptions of OP. The instrument used in the current study is an attempt to facilitate such an effort but, still, more work is needed to refine the questionnaire and ascertain its psychometric properties. Second, other

personality variables should be examined to better understand the effect of psychological variables on politicking, propensity to engage in OP, and/or general perceptions of OP. The need for achievement may be an important factor to explore in future research. Third, attention must be given to perception of the organization structure (e.g., degree of formalization), attitudes towards work groups, and the perception of equity in the distribution of organizational reward as they may pertain to OP. Since these factors have been widely identified in the literature as salient correlates of employee attitudes and behaviors, it is likely that they may also determine attitudes about politicking. Like other studies in OP, the current investigation has certain limitations which must be recognized. First, following Allen et al.(1979), the study did not provide the respondents with a clear definition of OP. Second, the instrument used to measure OP perceptions (i.e., POP and PSUS) has not been validated. However, it is based on pertinent research. Third, the study did not include a large number of variables related to employee perceptions of the work environment and the work group. However, all of this notwithstanding, the results presented in this paper do shed additional light on the important correlates of managerial perceptions of organizational politics.

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