

Does Perceived Organizational Politics Enhance Political Skills?

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Abstract

The researcher carried out this study to examine the predictive power of perceived organizational politics (POP) on their political skills regarding networking ability, interpersonal skills, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity. To investigate the given hypotheses, this study used a survey methodology, deductive reasoning technique, and positivist research philosophy. Data were collected from the seven hundred and twenty-five employees working in the Nepali Banking industry. Cross-sectional and perceptual data (Likert scale measure) were screened and analyzed employing SPSS. Regression analysis was carried out, keeping the demographic variables' effect constant. Regression analysis revealed that employees' POP enhanced the employees' political skills (i.e., networking ability, interpersonal skills, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity). Though POP significantly boosted all the factors of political skills (i.e., networking ability, interpersonal skills, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity), the predicting capacity differed among the elements. The number of theoretical and particular implications are suggested based on the result of the study.

Keywords: *Perceived workplace politics, Nepali context, social astuteness, networking ability, social astuteness, apparent sincerity.*

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Introduction

POP refers to the employee's subjective evaluation of their work environment where they perceive the presence of self-serving behavior and practices at the expense of or in support of others, which may or may not be aligned with other members of the organization as well as the organization itself. These perspectives are especially useful for making decisions, allocating resources, and advancing individual, group, and organizational objectives (Albrecht & Landells, 2012) under uncertainty, ambiguity, and competing interests. Again, such perception may or may not be valid with the objective realities.

The reviewed literature shows the inconsistent impacts of POP on employee outcomes. POP affects employee outcomes either adversely or favorably, or it may have no effect (Chang et al., 2009). Many scholars (e.g., Bhattarai, 2021b; Rosen & Levy, 2013) have verified the detrimental impacts of POP on employee outcomes. Employee POP, according to some researchers (e.g., Silvester, 2008; Valle & Perrewe, 2000), has no discernible excellent or negative effects. Their interaction mainly determines POP's positive or negative impact on people and the environment. Additionally, other researchers have demonstrated that POP has a favorable effect on workers and organizations (e.g., Buchanan, 2008; Hochwarter et al., 2010). They emphasized the necessity for a crucial degree of POP to mobilize the energies and draw attention, which would eventually boost employee results. Likewise, the impact of political beliefs on job results may not only be positive or adverse linear effects but also curvilinear, according to Ferris et al. (2007).

Because there is theoretical and empirical evidence that POP sometimes affects negatively, sometimes positively, and sometimes indifferently, managers struggle with whether to encourage, sometimes

discourage, or sometimes be indifferent to the political environment exhibited in the workplace (Bhattarai, 2021a). Therefore, before generalizing the effect of POP on employees and organizations, it is essential to carry out such a study under different contexts from different perspectives.

Political skill is conceptualized as an employee's set of abilities that help to understand and analyze self, other people, groups of people, and circumstances at work and utilization of such understanding to influence other people and situations to act in ways that enhance intended objectives of either individual or group or organization. According to Ferris et al. (2005), people with strong political skills have high levels of skills in influencing others socially and intellectually, networking skills, and the capacity to convey sincerity in their words and deeds.

In the study of POP, we cannot ignore the role of employee political skills because these constructs (employee resources) control the stated relationships (Silvester, 2008). But there is insufficient empirical evidence that deals the POP and political skills together; hence this study realized to measure the association of POP and political skills in the context of employees working in Nepali banking industries. Therefore, this study aims to measure the effect of POP on political skills in terms of networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity.

Review of Literature

Persevered Organizational Politics

POP refers to a person's view of how others operate or behave in a self-interested manner; these actions are typically linked to the manipulation of organizational policies and frequently use forceful methods, even at the cost of others, in order to achieve specific goals (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). Theoreticians and practitioners alike generally acknowledge that perceptions of corporate politics are a reality of organizational life. Organizations are social institutions where workers work individually and collectively to advance their interests. Hence it is improbable that there will ever be one without politics (Hochwarter, 2012). Organizations are political coalitions in which the bargaining process sets decision-making and goals (March 1962). Likewise, Landells and Albrecht (2016) state POP as interpretations people make about building and using power to have an impact on goal accomplishment, resource allocation, and decision-making.

The POP model is the most often used framework for analyzing political perceptions (Chang et al., 2009). The POP model was first presented by Ferris et al. (1989) and later tested by other academics (e.g., Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 2002; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). The antecedents, moderators, and effects of the POP are specified in this model (Ferris et al., 1989). There are three categories of antecedents: organizational influences (e.g., centralization, formalization), employment and work environment influence (e.g., career development, accountability), and personal results (e.g., positive affectivity, machiavellianism). The moderators include perceived control, political behavior, and understanding (Harrell-Cook et al., 1999). Among the adverse outcomes are decreased job satisfaction, increased job anxiety, decreased organizational commitment, and a variety of other adverse results (Ferris et al., 2002). Ferris et al. (1989) and later their extended models have tested the antecedents and consequences of POP and control and understanding as moderators between POP and employee outcomes.

Albrecht and Landells (2012) have emphasized organizational politics as 'is at something of a crossroads,' which stills seem at the same level, and paths are directed to various negative, positive, and neutral conceptualizations. Out of the ways one way involves the large number of ongoing publications of research based on negative conceptualizations, measures, and outcomes of organizational politics (e.g., Eldor, 2016; Ferris et al., 1989; Hill et al., 2016). This path is more related to the individual level of political perception, personal levels of political behavior, and individual levels of outcomes. The exact path guides this study. Because another path involves striving to understand both positive and negative POP, developing methods to assess these perceptions, and placing organizational politics within a broad theoretical framework that accepts both functional and dysfunctional outcomes, and it is conceptualized for organizational-level constructs.

Political Skills

Compared with POP and political behaviors, political skills are a relatively new construct in organizational science (Perrewe et al., 2012). Pfeffer (1981) brought the phrase “political skill” to academic literature for the first time as part of his political viewpoint on the organization, according to Ferris et al. (2012). Political skills were initially used by Pfeffer (1981) to refer to the networking and social abilities staff members need to negotiate challenging organizational situations effectively. Later definitions emphasize interpersonal style as it relates to political skill. For instance, Zellars et al. (2008) define it as an interpersonal style construct that integrates social intelligence with the flexibility to adjust one’s conduct in response to changing circumstances in a manner that comes across as genuine, inspires trust, and successfully influences others. Perrewe et al. (2012) describe it as the ability to understand people in the workplace and use that knowledge to influence other people’s actions in ways that benefit both the individual and the company. According to Ferris et al. (2007), political competence entails a comprehensive set of interpersonal skills that manifests itself in one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions and has consequences for oneself and others.

According to Ferris et al. (2005), social intelligence, interpersonal influence, networking abilities, and seeming sincerity have all been regarded to be components of political talents. The capacity to effectively grasp social interactions, analyze one’s conduct and that of others, and be acutely aware of a variety of social settings are all characteristics of social astuteness, according to Kimura (2014). Interpersonal influence is the capacity to persuade others subtly, compellingly, and suitably while effectively adapting and calibrating one’s conduct to each situation to elicit specific reactions. The capacity to build and use different networks of individuals to gain meaningful and essential resources for one’s own and an organization’s success is known as networking. Finally, to have great integrity, authenticity, sincerity, or genuineness is known as appearing to be sincere. These four aspects are the foundation of the majority of political skills research.

High levels of social intelligence, interpersonal influence, networking skills, and the capacity to convey sincerity via actions and words are characteristics of people with strong political aptitude. As a result, it is essential to the continuation and success of an organization (Ferris et al., 2012). The idea of political skill as a solid workplace ability is supported by the corpus of empirical research compiled over the previous 20 years (Kimura, 2014). For instance, research suggests that politically adept people outperform their less politically expert peers in terms of performance and satisfaction (Munyon et al., 2015), better career development opportunities (Wei et al., 2010), higher ratings for promotability (Gentry et al., 2012), and overall career success.

Association of Perceived Organizational Politics and Political Skills

Significant academic research has been done over the past 30 years on the moderators, predictors, and results of relationships between perceptions of organizational politics and other work outcomes. According to Hochwarter et al. (2010), unfavorable outcomes and attitudes related to politics have generally led to higher turnover intentions and worse performance levels. But not all people will experience adverse effects in all situations. Political skill, defined as the capacity to understand others at work effectively and to use that understanding to persuade others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and organizational objective, has long been argued to be essential to effectively managing workplace stressors (Ferris et al., 2005).

Kimura (2014) states that politically adept people are more likely to control interpersonal relations successfully because of their social astuteness and ability to influence interpersonal. Besides, political skills make interactions more predictable and thus reduce the pressures caused by uncertainty. Therefore, politically skilled individuals will perceive high levels of understanding and control when faced with workplace stressors and experience less strain than unskilled (Perrewe et al., 2012). Their innate social intelligence and networking skills are the source of these understandings and control. Particularly, politically astute people can accurately assess the working environment and the motivations of those who play supporting roles. The Ferris et al. (2007) model suggests that having political savvy might help with stress management by increasing one’s feeling of agency in social and professional settings. Perrewe et al. (2012)

state that political ability offers people comfort and calm self-assurance. Therefore, those with superior political abilities should view environmental stressors as less dangerous and more challenging. Politics are upsetting and unsettling because they introduce enormous uncertainty into the workplace by blurring the lines between effort and reward. But those who are politically savvy also have a deep understanding of the business world, which helps them make sound judgments about their surroundings and the intentions of those around them (Ferris et al., 2005); as a result, the perception that organizational politics influences employee outcomes is enhanced. Using the framework of Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, Ferris et al. (2007) propose that some individuals possess skills that may enable them to function effectively in a political environment. Hence, perceived politics at the workplace contributes to enhancing their political skills as a cope-up strategy, as explained by the conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989). From these theoretical analyses and empirical evidence, this study suggests the following Hypotheses:

H1: Employees' perceived workplace politics cause to enhance their networking ability

H2: Employees' perceived workplace politics cause to enhance their interpersonal influence.

H3: Employees' perceived workplace politics cause to enhance their social astuteness

H4: Employees' perceived workplace politics cause to enhance their apparent sincerity

Research Methods

Research Approach

Considering the study's objectives and adopted research philosophy, the deductive reasoning approach was adopted. By nature, the deductive reasoning approach best fits the principle and requirement of positivist research philosophy. Generally, positivist research studies commonly adopt the deductive reasoning approach (Crowther & Lancaster, 2008). To test the theory, quantitative research is more likely to be used with a deductive approach (Saunders et al., 2016), where several hypotheses are developed for empirical validation (Babbie, 2005).

Level of Analysis

When phenomena of interest are assumed to exist at several levels, the level of analysis has been recognized as a vital issue for avoiding research fallacies (such as the ecological fallacy and the exceptional fallacy) and subsequent inferential mistakes. One or more layers of phenomena may impact the development of a construct, and the latter may have varying effects on numerous layers. As a result, creating and improving the theory of organizational politics relies heavily on a good fit between the various levels of research. According to Hill et al. (2016), perceptual or subjective politics is highly significant at the personal level, whereas accurate or objective corporate politics is quite relevant at the group level. Therefore, it is essential to remember that POP at the individual level can have varying consequences at the pair, group, and organizational levels. In this research, we have examined how different dimensions (such as POP and political skills) are connected.

Measures

Socio-demographic Factors

Control factors in this research include workers' gender, age, length of service, union affiliation, and job titles. Such demographic variables were associated with the independent and dependent. For statistical analysis, demographic variables have been coded as dummy variables, for example, Male = 1 and Female = 2.

Perceived Organizational Politics

The POP scale, first proposed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) and later revisited by Vigoda (2001), consists of six items. After doing a factor and reliability analysis, Vigoda only used the items with the highest

loading values. This research adds three questions from Hochwarter et al. (2003) to the six-item measure modified by Vigoda to establish the construct's content validity further. These added items are: (1) "In this organization, people do what is best for them, not what is best for the organization," (2) "Here, people are more concentrated on pleasing senior and influential people who can help them"; and (3) "Here, individuals are stabbing each other in the back to look good in front of others." Respondents were given a 5-point scale to indicate their level of agreement with the statements made in the survey—the estimated value for the construct's alpha coefficient is .94.

Political Skills

Political skill dimensions have been measured using the 18-item Political Skill Inventory created by Ferris et al. (2005), with respondents rating their level of agreement with each topic from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The political talent inventory is the gold standard for modern conceptions of what constitutes political talent (Zettler & Lang, 2015). Snell et al. (2013) reported a five-factor model of political skill provided a significantly better fit to their data than a four-factor model. They added image management as an additional dimension to Ferris et al. (2005) model. Landells and Albrecht (2016) have proposed eight core dimensions of political skill- networking and forming coalitions, apparent sincerity, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, image management, bargaining and negotiating, setting agendas, and mapping the political terrain. However, these dimensions are not empirically tested.

In this study, the coefficient alpha for the political skill dimensions (Ferris et al., 2005) were as follows: networking ability (.86), interpersonal influence (.84), social astuteness (.84), and apparent sincerity (.84). A sample items for each political skill dimensions include: "I am good at using my connections and networks to make situation favorable to me at work" (networking ability). "I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me" (interpersonal influence). "I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others" (social astuteness). "People believe I am sincere in what I say and do."

Population, Sample, and Survey

Employees working in Nepali Banking Industry were the population of the study. The sample was selected in two stages combining the purposive and convenience sampling methods. In the first stage, all commercial banks were purposefully categorized into two groups, i.e., unionized and non-unionized. This categorization was made to take respondents from both types of banks. Representing both groups of banks, 17 banks were selected to survey their employees. In the second stage, from the 17 chosen banks, 1199 employees were selected for the survey through convenience sampling. Respondents were received from the employees working in Kathmandu and outside the Kathmandu workstation of the designated banks.

Among the employees, the focus has been paid on non-managerial employees because they perceive comparatively more politics than the managerial level, as explained by Zhou and Ferris (1995). However, diversified respondents, in terms of gender, age, department, education, designation, etc., were considered while selecting the sample respondents.

The questionnaire, including demographic details, was developed. Except for the demographic information, perceptual responses for all items have been obtained on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Each bank's chief executive officer (CEO) was asked to distribute surveys to their institution's customers. After contacting the CEO of each bank, the researcher was given contact information for a referrer responsible for distributing and collecting the surveys. A total of 1199 questionnaires were sent out to respondents, one at a time, with the aid of a reference person. Each participant had one week to complete the survey. Only 927 (or 77.31%) of the 1199 questionnaires sent out were filled out and returned. Only 873 questionnaires (72.81%) met all criteria for inclusion in the study. Following data screening, 725 responses (84.05% of those usable) were found to be in accordance with the acceptable measurement model.

Common Method Variance

Following the advice of Podsakoff et al. (2003), measures were taken to counteract typical methodological bias. Approximately 33% of the survey consisted of negatively worded questions that were reverse-scored to reduce the effect of response pattern biases.

This study, however, has put to the test Harman’s one-factor test, which employs principal component factor analysis of all the model variables to gauge the degree of prevalent technique bias. To determine how common CMV is, scientists have utilized a number of techniques, the most common of which being Harman’s one-factor (or single-factor) test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Indicators of significant bias include retaining just one component in the analysis (as shown by Harman’s one-factor test) or having one component account for most of the covariance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Data Analysis

First, we plotted a histogram and a normal Q-Q plot to check that the residual was normally distributed; second, we used a scatter plot to look for signs of heteroscedasticity; third, we plotted a standardized regression residual to see how linear the relationship between the dependent and independent variables was; and finally, we calculated variance inflation factors (VIFs) to see how strongly the variables were correlated. Normality, homoscedasticity, and the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables were verified by visually examining the Q-Q plot and histogram, the scatter plot, and the regression normalized residual curve. After confirming the normality of the data, multiple regressions were carried out after controlling the effect of demographic variables to measure the impact of POP on political skills.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the mean value of POP, networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity was measured as 2.73, 3.15, 3.52, 3.72, and 3.06 respectively, with standard deviationsof .91, .71, .62, .68, and .59. Mean values of the study constructs were found between 2.73 to 3.72 out of point five. The highest mean value was measured at 3.72 for social astuteness with a standard deviation of .68. The lowest value was estimated at 2.73 for POP with a standard deviation of .91. Likewise, standard deviations were found from .59 to .91. The highest standard deviation was measured .91 for POP. Lowest variation was measured .59 for apparent sincerity. The mean value was calculated from more than two items for each construct. Multiple items of each construct were measured in the Likert-type scale as the form of agreement or disagreement with the particular statement.

Table 1
Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Matrix of the Study Constructs

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1) Perceived organizational politics	2.73	.91	-				
2) Networking ability	3.15	.71	.33***	-			
3) Interpersonal skills	3.52	.62	.24***	.51***	-		
4) Social astuteness	3.72	.68	.29***	.68***	.66***	-	
5) Apparent sincerity	3.06	.59	.11*	.50***	.48***	.58***	-

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, significance of the correlation

Table 1 depicts the Pearson correlation of the study variables. Correlation coefficients rangedbetween .11 to .68. Correlations between all the constructs were relatively positive and found to be statistically significant. Out of the statistically significant correlation of the construct,the positive correlation between networking ability and social astuteness was comparatively strong ($r = .68$, $p < .01$). And the positive correlation between POP and apparent sincerity was weak ($r = .11$, $p < .05$).

As shown in Table 2, all the coefficient of POP to predict political skills (i.e., networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness and apparent sincerity) were calculated the holding constant the effect of

demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, tenure, unionization of organization, membership of the union, and designation). As depicted in Table 2, column second, to predict the networking ability, the coefficient of POP was statistically significant ($B = .28, p < .001$). A total of 16.40 percent of variation ($R^2 = .164, p < .001$) in networking ability has been explained by demographic variables and POP. Hence hypothesis 1 was accepted. Likewise, as depicted in Table 2, column third, to predict the interpersonal influence, the coefficient of POP was statistically significant ($B = .17, p < .001$). Total of 11.10 percent of variation ($R^2 = .111, p < .001$) in interpersonal influence has been explained by demographic variables and POP. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Table 2
Direct association of POP on political skills

	Dependent variables: Political skills			
	Networking Ability (<i>B</i>)	Interpersonal influence (<i>B</i>)	Social Astuteness (<i>B</i>)	Apparent Sincerity (<i>B</i>)
Demographic Control Variables				
Gender	-.21***	-.06	-.13**	-.04
Age	.03	-.04	-.05	-.06
Tenure	.18*	.22**	.33***	.18**
Unionization	-.02	-.24***	-.22**	-.16*
Membership of the union	-.05	.11**	.09*	.05
Designation	.08*	-.01	.06	.04
Main Effect				
Perceived organizational politics	.28***	.17***	.24***	.08**
R ²	.164	.111	.156	.04
F	20.09***	12.80***	18.97***	4.19***

***, **, *, significance at .001, .01, and .05 levels, respectively

Similarly, in the fourth column of Table 2, to predict social astuteness, the coefficient of POP was statistically significant ($B = .24, p < .001$). A total of 15.60 percent of variation ($R^2 = .156, p < .001$) in social astuteness has been explained by demographic variables and POP. Accordingly, hypothesis 3 was accepted. In the same way, in the fifth column of Table 2, to predict the apparent sincerity, the coefficient of POP was statistically significant ($B = .08, p < .01$). Total of eight percentages of variation ($R^2 = .04, p < .01$) in apparent sincerity has been explained by demographic variables and POP. Hence, hypothesis 4 was accepted. It indicated that employees' POP positively impacted their political skills (i.e., networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity).

Discussion

The result of the current study revealed that POP enhances the employee's political skills, i.e., networking abilities, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity. This means if employees perceive their workplace as political, it will enhance their political skills (i.e., networking abilities, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity) as a coping mechanism. There is a wide range of controversial findings regarding the impact of POP on employees and organizations. Perspective one: Detrimental effects of POP on employee outcomes. Researchers from perspective one (Crawford et al., 2019; Ferris et al., 1989; Rosen & Levy, 2013) have stated and tested that POP, which is inevitable in the workplace, are harmful to both employee as well as the organization and it leads to detrimental results to them. If an employee perceives their working environment as political, that negatively impacts employee outcomes directly or indirectly. Hence, the current study's findings contradict the empirical evidence and the theoretical model.

Perspective two: POP is a challenging stressor on employee outcomes. Scholars from perspective three (e.g., Buchanan, 2008; Butcher & Clarke, 2006; Hochwarter et al., 2010) have proved that POP positively affects employees and organizations. Hochwarter et al. have highlighted that a critical level of perceived organizational politics is needed to activate attention and mobilize the energies which ultimately improve employee outcomes. These studies and their results make up the current study's findings. These results also provide credence to Hobfoll's COR hypothesis (1989). COR theory postulates that individuals will take measures to prevent the waste, destruction, or deterioration of valuable resources wherever possible (Hobfoll, 1989). Hobfoll (1989) defines resources as "anything of value to an individual or any means by which an individual may acquire such things, qualities, events, or powers." In the context of POP, resources consume the POP, and employees generate resources in the form of political skills (e.g., networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, apparent sincerity) to cope with the stress caused by perceived politics at their workplace.

Nearly three decades of empirical research have shown that employees respond negatively to their perceptions of politics in the work environment (Rosen et al., 2009). The negative conceptions of corporate politics have dominated empirical research and the wide area of organizational politics (Hochwarter, 2012), despite the fact that researchers have acknowledged and studied the positive features of organizational politics for a significant amount of time in the past. However, as discussed in the previous section, the impacts of POP on employee outcomes can be positive, negative, or neutral, depending on the workplace environment and the observer's characteristics. Therefore, further studies are recommended to consider environmental factors like working industry, culture, individual differences, events, national politics, etc.

Conclusion and Implications

This study was carried out to measure the contribution of employees' perceived politics on enhancing their political strategies as coping strategies. The study concluded that employees' perceived political work environment generates their political skills through networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity. Therefore, all the factors of political skills like networking abilities, interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity are generated as the cope up strategy for the stress created by perceived workplace politics. In the literature on organizational politics, this theory can be a foundation for further study to measure the relationship between perceived politics and political skills under different contexts. Practically, the organization may manipulate the employees' political skills as it can be a source of mitigating tools for the detrimental effect of POP.

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