

Organizational Politics and Employees Performance: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract

Organizational politics play a large role in how most organizations function and develop. Human beings are political animals in nature hence making difficult to prevent politics at the work place. Organizational politics have so many influences on the affairs and behavior of employees in an organization and is the pursuit of individual agendas and self-interest in an organization without regard to their effect on the organizations efforts to achieve its goals. It is an undisputable fact that over the years, organizations have battled with organizational politics and are still putting in all possible efforts to mitigate this problem so as not to affect the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. This desk reviewed paper examines the effect of organizational politics on employees' performance at the workplace in the context of pay, promotion, power and equity.

Keywords

Organization Politics, Pay, Promotion, Power, Equity, Employees Performance

1. Introduction

Organizations are viewed as complex systems of individuals and coalitions, each having its own interests, beliefs, values, preferences, perspectives, and perceptions. The coalitions continuously compete with each other for scarce organizational resources. Influence as well as the power and political activities through which this is acquired and maintained is the primary weapon for use in competition and conflict. Organizational goals are mainly established by people in positions of formal authority. Goals result from ongoing maneuvering and bargaining among individuals and coalitions. Most coalitions are transitory: They shift with issues and often cross vertical and horizontal organizational boundaries.

Organizational goals change with shifts in the balance of power among coalitions. Power relations are permanent features of organizations primarily because specialization and division of labor result in the creation of many interdependent organization's units with varying degrees of importance to the well-being of the organization. The units compete with each other for scarce resources as well as with the transitory coalitions.

2. Background

The body of literature on organizational politics is expanding but still the research remains distorted with respect to theory and research methodologies adopted (Ene, 2014). Despite a lot of empirical data, conceptual vagueness still exists. Organizational politics is proved to be fact of life (Vigoda, 2000). An attempt to conceptualize the perceptions of organizational politics identified three factors which are labeled as: general political behavior (GPB), that includes individuals who act in a self-serving manner to obtain valued outcomes; go along to get ahead (GAGA), which consists of a lack of action by individuals for example remaining silent in order to secure valued outcomes; and pay and promotion policies (PPP), which involves the organization behaving politically through the policies it enacts (Kacmar & Carlson, 1998).

Regardless of the widespread acceptance of presence of organizational politics proved by empirical research, this aspect of life at workplace remains a problem. Before 1970s, organizational politics was considered impermissible in management field. Organizational politics started getting attention when the concept of organizational rationality was challenged because of the emergence of concepts like person-organization misfit and incompatibility of personal and organizational goals. The concept of organizational rationality was based on the idea that, individuals decide their goals by keeping in view the organizational goals and are expected to work for the achievement of their personal goals according to the rules and regulations of the organization. But a realistic picture of life at workplace showed the existence of conflicting goals within the organization. This existence of conflicting goals in organizations gave birth to organizational politics which has proved to be a significant part of both public and private organizations (Drory & Romm, 1990; Vigoda & Drory, 2006; DuBrin, 1988; Pfeffer, 2010).

According to Zanzi and O'Neill (2001), definitions of organizational politics fall into two broad categories. The first is organizational politics as negative and involves self-serving and unsanctioned behavior. Such behaviors are divisive, illegitimate, dysfunctional and conflict achieving. The second view perceives politics in a more neutral light and accepts that it can sometimes be functional. Two distinct categories of political tactics argued by Zanzi and O'Neil (2001) are sanctioned political tactics and non-sanctioned political tactics. Sanctioned political tactics refers to political tactics that social actors consider acceptable because they are part of organizations' norms. On the other hand, non-sanctioned political tactics are the ones that social actors consider unacceptable and unde-

sirable. Social actors secretly perform non-sanctioned political tactics. Subsequently they conducted factor analysis to classify the proposed political tactics. The results of the factor analysis suggest that a two-factor solution is most appropriate for classifying the proposed political tactics. The first factor includes six political tactics: Use of expertise, super-ordinate goals, image building, networking, persuasion, and coalition building. The second factor includes seven political tactics: Intimidation and innuendoes, using surrogates, blaming or attacking, manipulation, organizational placement, co-optation, and control of information. Zanzi and O'Neil (2001) label the first and second items as non-sanctioned political tactics and sanctioned political tactics, respectively. Sussman et al. (2002) reviewed classification scheme proposed by Allen et al. (1979) and posits that one of the original eight political tactics considerably overlaps with another political tactic proposed in the classification scheme. Therefore, proposing a reduction of the number of political tactics used by social actors from eight to seven. These seven political tactics proposed by Sussman et al. (2002) include: attacking or blaming others, using information as a political tool, creating and maintaining a favorable image, developing a base of support, ingratiation, developing allies and forming power coalitions, and lastly creating obligations and reciprocity. They report that first and second the most frequently used political tactics include ingratiation and developing power allies or forming power coalitions respectively. The least commonly used political tactic is using information as an instrument. They also conducted a factor analysis to classify political tactics. The results of the factor analysis show that seven political tactics can be classified into two categories: Self focused tactics and relationship focused tactics. First one includes attacking or blaming others, using information as a political tool, creating a favorable image. Second one includes developing a base of support, developing coalitions, creating obligations. The results of the factor analysis also report that ingratiation political tactic is a moderator for both political tactic categories and the most frequent of this political tactic can also be attributed to its moderator role.

Sussman et al. (2002) study provides two important additional insights on political tactics in organizations. First one is extension of Allen et al. (1979) findings that vertical fragmentation in an organization influences the choice of political tactics. They suggest that not only vertical fragmentation but also horizontal fragmentation influence the choice of political tactics. The research findings provide a strong empirical support to their proposition. Second one is the introduction of communication channels to research agenda of the political tactics. Sussman et al. (2002) political tactics carried out by using communication channels. They suggest that the communication channels used to send politically related messages can be classified into four major categories. These are: face to face, telephone, email, and written. The research findings also provide empirical support to their proposition that communication channels influence the choice communication used in sending politically related messages.

Vigoda (2000) reported that perception of organizational politics was found to have a negative relationship with job attitudes. For example, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, a positive relationship with intention to leave the organization that is exit, and a stronger positive relationship with negligent behavior referred to as neglect. Drory and Gadot (2010) findings provide a critical examination of the meaning of organizational politics (OP) for human resource management (HRM). They expressed their discussion in three main sections. First, they describe the negative image of OP and suggest that it has some positive dimensions useful for understanding HRM. Based on previous writings they present a balanced and non-judgmental approach towards politics in HRM. They extend the discussion to suggest a specific typology and model that in their view, better explains the meaning of OP for HRM than current definitions. The model includes aspects of positive constructive HRM, negative destructive HRM, ineffective HRM, and virtual HRM. Finally, they examine the implications of the model in the context of the changing Israeli cultural environment. The findings of Karppinen (2008) indicate that the respondents have perceived rather considerable level of politics at their organizations.

According to Mintzberg (1983), organizational behavior is viewed as a power game. The players are influencers with carrying personal needs who attempt to control organizational decisions and actions. Thus, to understand the behavior of the organization, it is necessary to understand which influencers are present, what needs each seeks to fulfill in the organization, and how each is able to exercise power to fulfill them. Eleven groups of possible influencers are listed; five are in the external coalition and six in the internal coalition. The external coalition consists of the owners' associates, employee associations, the organization's various public, and the corporate directors. The internal coalition is composed of the chief executive officer, operators, line managers, analysts, the support staff, and the final "actor" in Mintzberg's internal coalition, the ideology of the organization. The Power Game and the Players of People are driven by a variety of needs by intrinsic values such as the need for control or autonomy, or in Maslow's (1954) needs hierarchy theory, by physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization needs; by the values instilled in them as children or developed later through socialization and various identifications; by the need to exploit fully whatever skills and abilities they happen to have; by their desire to avoid repetition of painful experiences or repeat successful ones; by opportunism, the drive to exploit whatever opportunities happen to present themselves. All of these needs contribute to the makeup of each influencer and lead to an infinite variety of behaviors.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Organizational Politics

Organizational politics is the use of power to affect decision making. It is also, when individuals have divergent views about how resources are to be used and

mobilized. Pfeffer (2010) for instance, defined politics as a social function that can contribute to the basic functioning of organizations. How rewards are to be distributed as well as how punishments are to be meted out. These opposing views are of a major concern to both employees and managers as they form the major causes of political struggle for resources. The reasons are pragmatic; the extreme forms of illegitimate political behavior pose a real risk of losing organizational membership or incurring extreme sanctions. Interview with experience managers shows that most people believe political behavior is a major part of organizational life. Majority of the managers reported that certain level of political behavior is both ethical and necessary, as long as it does not directly harm anyone (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007).

Organizational politics is about manipulating power and authority to build relationship to get things done. Organizational politics is the use of one's individual or assigned power within an employing organization for the purpose of obtaining advantages beyond one's legitimate authority. Those advantages may include access to tangible assets, or intangible benefits such as status or pseudo-authority that influences the behavior of others. Both individuals and groups may engage in organizational politics (Weissenberger-Eibl & Benjamin, 2010). Organizational politics, sometimes referred to as office politics which strictly includes office workers, although the meaning is usually intended in the wider sense is the use of one's individual or assigned power within an employing organization for the purpose of obtaining advantages beyond one's legitimate authority (Parker et al, 1995). This definition is in line with the definition of office politics brought by Dhar (2011) where he defined office politics as the exercise of power to negotiate different interests amongst members while maintaining one's interests in certain organizational issues. Hence, in office politics game, conflict always exists due to power competition.

Political behavior are activities that are not required as part of one's formal role in the organization, but that influence, or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organizations (Robbins, 2008). Political behavior has both good and bad implications in the organizational productivity. Good political behaviors are those that enhance the achievement of personal, group and organizational goal. The emphasis on personal and group goals becomes necessary because all must be carried along. Bad political behaviors are those that discourage trust, instill fear, enhance disunity, breed suspicion and sustain infighting among employees. The authors stress that; managers in various organizations should prevent bad political behavior since they are in charge of their firms; cautions should be taken when handling such situations. The authors point that checking or controlling political behavior is possible to be achieved through the following strategies; discouraging vindictive gossips which aims at assassinating co-employees' character; avoiding oversized ego which encourages power stricken employees to "apple-polish" an executive; being cautious of joining coalitions by carefully scrutinizing reasons why such informa-

tion groups are formed; disseminating information that will enhance achievement of organizational goal and among others.

[Robbins \(2008\)](#) suggests that, political behaviors should be considered only when they are guided by the following moral rules as: utilitarian rule, individual right rule and distributive justice rule. The same author repeats that, utilitarian rule is a type of political behavior for the greatest good of the greatest number, that is it focuses on serving personal and group interest. Individual right rule focuses on right to privacy, free speech, due process or other rights while, distributive justice rule focus on equal treatment of all parties fairly. Among all the three moral rules that control political behavior, distributive justice rule is considered the best. The reason for its choice is that it supports the purpose of this study which focuses on the impact of power and politics in the work place. Distributive justice rule motivates both employees to work.

According to [Robbins and Judge \(2013\)](#), pay and promotion decisions have consistently been found to be one of the most political actions in organizations. The opportunity for promotion or advancement encourages people to compete for limited resources and try to positively influence the decision outcome. The pay structure of the employees is very well structured. They have a basic pay and commissions for sales made, but in order to earn the basic pay they have to meet Key Performance Indicators. In other words, there is presence of a target-performance for the contractors. This is the HRM practice part, where the soft and hard approach of management of human resources comes into play. According to [Lok & Crawford \(1999\)](#), the soft approach to HRM incorporates employee motivation, commitment and development, whereas, the hard approach to HRM is much closely knit with the business strategy accomplishment and cost minimization. On the other hand, the hard approach does not prefer in investing much for the development of employees. It aligns with the business strategy to achieve their firm targets. In doing so, it has the possibility of failing to motivate the employees. And if the employees are left dissatisfied, there will be less productivity and high employee turnover. Thus, HRM practitioners need to implement a justified blend of the hard and soft approaches to HRM in their operations. [Ferris and King \(1991\)](#) suggested the model below relating organizational politics and HRM depicting two components. These are political skills and use of influence behavior.

Politics in human resources decisions model ([Figure 1](#)).

According to [Samia \(2013\)](#), in case of promotion, for example in Australia or New Zealand, they only promote a sales representative to a team leader, if the person is a permanent resident or citizen. This acts as an external political factor that affects employee development, because no matter how competent one representative is, his way up the corporate ladder is constrained due to law or due to company's corporate governance policy. The managerial decision making is thereby influenced by the industrial regulations. Political influence refers to the presence of the potential for non-rational and political, rather than strategic

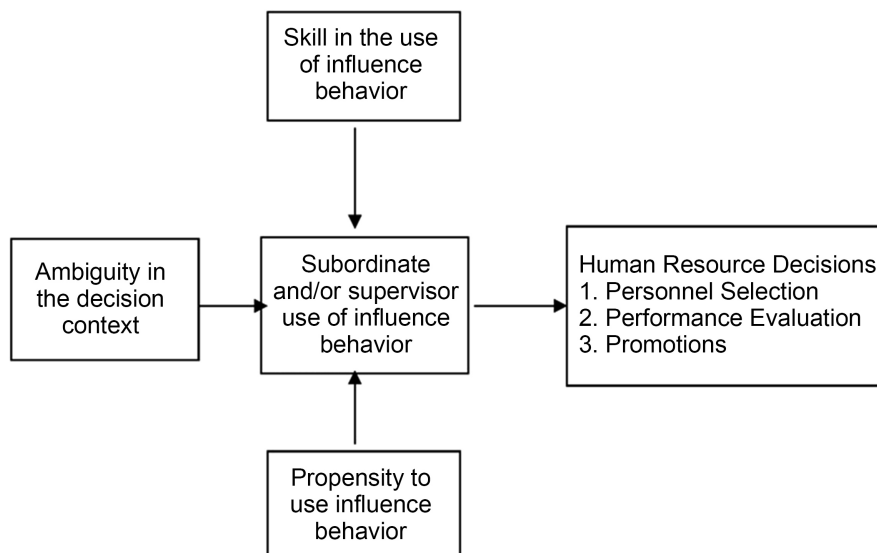


Figure 1. Source: Ferris and King (1991).

or technical, concerns to influence HRM function. The decision to have an incompetent person, promoted to a more demanding role, based on non-rational good rapport, is again an evidence of lacking of a concrete regulation (Allen et al., 1979). Apart from the aforesaid, the lack of skill and knowledge of the HRM practitioner to direct any necessary positive role in demonstrating the concept of hard and soft mix strategy can also contribute in the ineffectiveness of HRM (Lok & Crawford, 1999). This is very likely to occur when an incompetent professional is designated in a post that he is not capable enough to operate in. For instance, if management has promoted any personnel into a higher post, due to the practice of political influence, the professional's lacking in carrying forward his or her duties in an effective and efficient manner, is the prime example of such phenomenon. It should be noted that the HRM practitioners in this field also should be committed in performing their role as deciders of the strategy only if they are strong-willed and focused.

Dubrin (1989), defined power as the potential or ability to influence decisions and control resources. It is also defined as the ability to influence another to do the others' wishes. When a person is able to make another person change from his original position to the position the other suggests, either through force or subtly, then power is said to have been exercised (Nnabuike, 2009). The author argues that, power can be exercised unintentionally and intentionally without being conscious of it. The source of power is derived from: legitimate, reward, coercive, expert and referent power. Legitimate power is type of power derived due to the position of power holder within the hierarchy of firm. It stems from an authority's legitimate right to require and demand compliance. Coercive power is the power to issue treat or punishment. To be effective employees must fear punishment (Belen, 2008). Reward power is a type of power used to reward those who comply with commands and other. Expert power is the power to control

others due to possession of specialized skills and experience. Referent power is the power to influence others due to admiration of personal traits and characteristics (McShane & von Glinow, 2010). In addition, legitimate power, coercive power and reward power are type of power stemming from the organization's position, while expert and referent power are types of power stemming from the individual as a personal. As mentioned before, the source of these power can be exercised positively or negatively in the work place. Politics is also defined as influence on either individual or group (Ivencivich et al., 2008). It is also the pursuit of self-interest in response to real or imagined opposition.

The need of power is more associated with leaders. As mentioned by McClelland and Boyatzis (1982), need of achievement was associated with lower level workers, while leaders are more involved with need for power which associated them with influencing others. Need for power refers to the ability to influence others, defeating an opponent or competitor, winning and arguing or attaining a position of greater authority (Yulk, 1989). McClelland and Watson (1973) have divided need for power into two dimensions which are socialized power and personal power. Socialized power including influencing others for the sake of organizational goals is the characteristic of effective manager. On the other hand, personal power portrays personal dominance or aggression (Harrell & Stahl, 1981). Therefore, in utilizing politics in organization, employees will utilize or manipulate their power to win the competition among themselves.

If political tactics are used to advance causes in the organization that serve to benefit everyone equally, then they are more likely to be seen as purposeful and legitimate (Simmons, 2009). Power, influence and politics have some effect on every member of an organization and thus on the entire organizational unit. Based on the equity theory (Adams, 1965) and on the idea of social exchange and social reciprocity (Blau, 1964), the motivation to perform better and the development of positive employee attitudes and behaviors, depend on the display of similar positive attitudes and behaviors by other members of the organization who are peers, supervisors, the management and the organizations as a whole. Therefore, many scholars have argued that the relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is an important one that deserves careful and thorough investigation (Kacmar & Carlson, 1998; Zhou & Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Kacmar, 1991) and one that has the potential to enhance our understanding of multiple aspects of performance.

Generally, equity theory of motivation attempts to explain how people strive for fairness and justice in social or give-and-take relationship. And as a process theory, it explains how a person's motivation to act in a certain way is propelled by feelings of inequity. It attempts to explain the social comparisons that people make when they compare their inputs such as work efforts, time spent on work, qualifications and skills with outputs such as pay, recognition, promotion among others they receive (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007). Simply put, Adams (1965) equity theory states that an employee assesses his or her work inputs against what he or

she receives that is outputs and makes comparisons with another employee's ratio of inputs and outputs. The problem arises when comparison is made and there is perception of unfairness or rather inequity.

Organizational justice theories are usually partitioned into three components namely distributive, procedural, and interactional. Distributive justice focuses on the extent to which individuals perceive an outcome received in return for effort as fair and is linked to equity theory of motivation (Kang, 2007). When employees experience inequity in terms of their organizations' HRM practices, could result in behavioural and attitudinal changes that may be detrimental to service delivery. While distributive justice reflects the perceived fairness in the allocation of outcomes in terms of resources and rewards, procedural justice is concerned with the perceived fairness of the procedures or processes used in arriving at and administering decisions (Kang, 2007). Procedural fairness will be important to employees because it will offer them some assurance of fairness of HRM practices such as promotion, performance evaluation, grievance handling among others. Research shows that positive perceptions of both procedural and distributive justice can be enhanced by involving employees in decision making (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007). It seems reasonable then to assume that organizations can enhance perceptions of both procedural and distributive justice by involving employees in HRM decision making regardless of political affiliation. The third component, interactional justice is about the quality of interpersonal treatment in the implementation of organizational decisions (Kang, 2007), that is, whether or not people feel they are treated fairly in the implementation of decision (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007). Brockner and Wiesenfeld (2005), have called for integrated studies involving all three forms of organizational justice. Acting on the evidence of a meta-analysis of numerous empirical research, Kreitner and Kinicki (2007), added to this call by coming to the important conclusion that all three forms of justice correlate with among others, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour.

3.2. Employees Performance

Organizational politics have at least some effect on every member in it and thus on the entire organizational unit. Based on the equity theory (Adams, 1965) and on the idea of social exchange and social reciprocity (Blau, 1964), the motivation to perform better and the development of positive employee attitudes and behaviors depend on the display of similar positive attitudes and behaviors by other members of the organization. These include peers, supervisors, the management and the organization as a whole. Therefore, many scholars have argued that the relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is an important one that deserves careful and thorough investigation (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) and one that has the potential to enhance our understanding of multiple aspects of performance. From different angles, several studies have tested POPs (perceptions of organizational politics) in rela-

tion to a handful of performance-oriented variables (Vigoda & Drory, 2006). From these studies, empirical evidence has accumulated mainly considering the negative effect of organizational politics on job satisfaction (Zhou & Ferris, 1995), organizational commitment, job stress and strain and job burnout (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Vigoda & Drory, 2006). Nonetheless, most studies have examined the possibility of a direct relationship between POPs and performance.

Studies that have tested indirect POPs (performance of organizational politics) relationships have yielded encouraging findings. Zivnuska et al. (2004) found that the interaction of organizational politics and impression management explained a significant incremental amount of variance in supervisor ratings of employee performance. Kacmar & Ferris (1991) found out that distributive and procedural justice moderates the POPs-performance relationship. The negative effect of POPs on job satisfaction and the positive effect of POPs on turnover intentions are weaker when both forms of justice are high. The findings of these researchers followed a study of Byrne (2005) who suggested fairness as a good moderator of several relationships: POPs turnover intentions, POPs-formal performance, and POPs-Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Generally speaking, perceiving the organizational environment as fair reduced the negative covert effect of POPs on job performance. Poon (2006) examined two moderating models and found several meaningful indirect effects. First, intentions to quit and job stress resulting from POPs were higher among employees who felt they had little control compared to those who felt they had a high level of control. Second, it was found that POPs mediated the relationship between trust in supervisors and helping co-workers. Trust leads to helping behavior in situations where POPs is low but has no effect on helping behavior when POPs is high.

4. Emerging Issues

Positive organizational politics can be beneficial to an organization's health. Unfortunately, many people are yet to come to terms and embrace the topic. It can enhance work outcomes and bring out change in organizations. If perceived positively, OP can contribute towards resolving organizational conflicts, empowerment of employees, and manage workforce diversity within work organizations. Leaders have to engage in politics to achieve goals but the litmus test should be why they use politics. It is evident that the relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is significant and deserves careful and thorough investigation. One of the ways in which employees will seek to restore equity in event of perceived inequity is to change own inputs in behaviour or attitudes (Bagraim, 2007). Thus, employees who might perceive inequity in for example pay, promotion, reward or other outputs may probably change their attitude towards customers they serve. It is therefore important for managers to fully comprehend equity theory and be aware of its implications when they make decisions concerning such things such as pay, bonus, fringe benefits and promotions. Unfortunately, many organizations do not look good

as accusations about favoritism and nepotism abound concerning recruitment, pay, promotion and other HRM related matters.

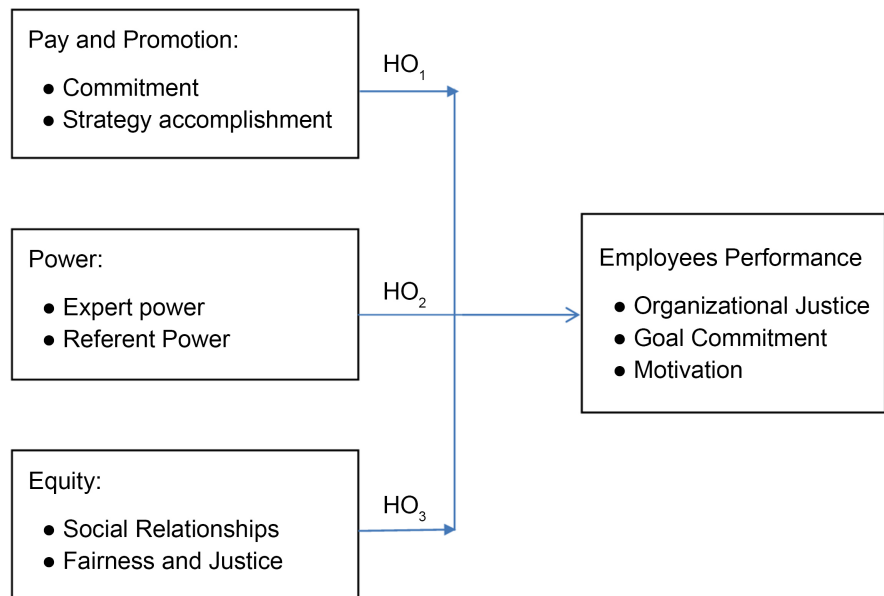
Chang et al., (2009), observes that politicking activities in an organization may create conflicts although the stress and social exchange perspectives are useful to understand reactions to perceptions of organizational politics. This is due the fact that political behavior is a way of life in organization and encompasses those activities that are not required as part of one's formal role in the organization. Parker et al. (1995) research findings suggested that organizational politics is an important dimension of peoples' perception of the work environment. As maintained by Chang et al., (2009), perceptions of organizational politics had a stronger relationship with role conflict. The authors also revealed that perceptions of organizational politics have strong, positive relationship with strain and turnover intention and strong, negative relationships with job satisfaction and affective commitment. In particular, perceptions of organizational politics were associated with increased psychological strain, which associated directly with reduced performance, as well as indirectly with increased turnover intentions through reduce morale. Political behavior has both good and bad implications in the organizational productivity. Good political behaviors are those that enhance the achievement of personal, group and organizational goal. The emphasis on personal and group goals becomes necessary because all must be carried along. Bad political behaviors are those that discourage trust, instill fear, enhance disunity, breed suspicion and sustain infighting among employees.

Globalization, technology advancement and desire for human beings to excel in the field have led to significant changes in management of human behavior and channeling it into correct direction. Application of motivational theories, art of leadership and skill of redesigning jobs and modification of organizational structure is an ongoing process that facilitates positive work environment leading to raised job satisfaction of employees, greater productivity and organizational growth. Due to scientific knowledge development, managing human resources has become more challenging (Kondalkar, 2007). It has been observed that everybody wants to use power for influencing behavior of people in organizations for gaining personal goals. There is some confusion concerning the proximate terms which are often represented together when organizational politics is discussed. The most commonly used and definitely one of the most important synonymous is power. It has been widely recognized that both politics and power are significant part of human behavior as they affect the ability to secure one's goals and interests in a social system.

The concept of power and politics is becoming increasingly interdependent. This means that power and politics in most times are related to one another. Without the use of power and politics, it is difficult for any organization or institution to survive. Even naturally, man is political in nature; therefore, anything involving man is also political in nature.

5. Proposed Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Organizational Politics



Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between pay and promotion and organizational politics on employees' performance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between power and organizational politics on employees' performance.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between equity and organizational politics on employees' performance.

6. Conclusion and Research Gaps

According to Gbadamosi, & Nwosu (2011) findings, work behaviour and organizational success are related, and the environment in which one works in is very crucial to organizational behaviour and success. They continued and said that organizational politics and commitment are however the most powerful factors in employees' efficiency and effectiveness. It would be necessary to research further on the environmental factors crucial to an organization's behavior and success and find out how organization politics can be converted into positivity since it highly influence employees' performance. Since the author's approach was purely desk review, it is highly recommended to subject the variables under review through a primary research process and test the hypotheses proposed.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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