

Full Length Research Paper

The most prevailing aspect of organisational politics that influences job performance: Case study of Malaysian Government servants

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The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between organisational politics (OP) and its components with job performance (JP). The components of OP are general political behavior (GPB), going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP). The study, also determined the contribution of the overall organisational politics, general political behavior, going along to get ahead and pay and promotion policies on job performance. Consequently, the study investigated the most prevailing aspect of organisational politics that influences job performance. The multistage random sampling consisted of 349 civil servants that were selected in Malaysian public organisations. The results revealed that the overall of OP and its components were related negatively to job performance. The GATGA aspect of OP emerged as the most prevailing factor that influenced JP. Findings and implications for managerial practices from the study are discussed and put forward.

Key words: Organisational politics, job performance.

INTRODUCTION

Work environments have gone through inevitable evolution witnessing a number of monumental transformations. Operations are now conducted in revolutionized ways that were unknown before. In the current ever-dynamic marketplace, organisations are faced with continuous challenges ranging from hard (like technological) to soft (like behavioral) in nature. Negative behaviors will ultimately result in reduced job performance, moreover if they are linked with unhealthy elements such as organisational politics. This scenario is without exception in Malaysia. In pursuit of economic expansion and to enhance the socio-economic condition of the citizens, the civil service staff in Malaysian public sector is left with no other option but to gain competitive advantage by ameliorating its efficiency. In tandem with that goal, these civil servants need to manifest high job performance by acquiring the right values, behaviors and emotions. However, this can be threatened by the presence of factors such as OP that have proven to be detrimental to the organisations (Conner, 2006). The questions are: what is the relationship between OP and JP and what is the most prevailing aspect of OP that influences JP? This

study attempted to answer those unanswered questions among civil servants in Malaysian public organisations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational politics (OP) has been one of the popular subject in industrial or organisational psychology due to its impact on organisational outcomes such as job dissatisfaction (Poon, 2004), turnover intent (Harris et al., 2005), disloyalty, lowered perceived innovation (Parker et al., 1995) as well as lowered job performance (Byrne, 2005). However, it was not until the last twenty years that OP is discussed in earnest in the literature, despite the rampancy of OP in the organisational settings. In addition, researchers have suggested that further investigation should be conducted on the antecedents of job performance (JP) especially relating to behavioral aspects such as organisational politics (Rosen et al., 2006). Due to this scenario it is very important to embark on a study pertaining the impact of OP on behavioral outcomes such as JP.

Organisational scientists have offered various (yet relatively coherent) definitions of organisational politics. In the early works like Allen et al.'s (1979), OP is defined as intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self interest of individuals or groups. Pettigrew (1973) defined OP as the use of power to influence decision making, while Pfeffer (1981) as cited in Cobb (1986) describes OP as how power is used to resolve uncertainty and/or dissention regarding organisational actions and objectives. In spite of various definitions, Kacmar and Carlson (1997) concluded that OP definitions share few aspects in common: (a) political activities are a means of exercising social influence, (b) political behaviors are designed to promote or protect one's self interests, (c) at least two parties with the potential to possess different interests must be involved. This study used the definition given by Cropanzano et al., (1995), which defined OP as social influence to those who can provide rewards that will help promote or protect the self-interests of the actor(s). This definition is also shared by these studies (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997; Harris et al., 2005).

Much of the scholarly research in the field of organisational theory is originated in a quest to understand the antecedents and effects of organisational politics on individual productivity and job performance in workplace. However, despite the abundance of OP-related research in the literature, the results are still far from being generalizable due to the settings of the studies (Parker et al., 1995; Vigoda, 2007). This, together with the pervasiveness and effects of OP in the workplace, makes further investigation still necessary (Poon, 2003). Amongst the studies done in the domain of perceived OP, its linkage with work outcomes such as job performance has drawn the interests of few researchers (Aryee et al., 2004; Byrne, 2005; Chen and Fang, 2007; Zivnuska et al., 2004). In the same vein, this paper attempted to examine the relationship between OP and JP and determined which of the OP's component contributes most to job performance. Furthermore, to date, there are limited studies regarding to OP done in Malaysia and none of them have attempted to test the relationship between OP and job performance among civil servants. At that, researching the relationship between OP and job performance is deemed crucial as JP will directly impact organisational performance (Parker, 2007).

Organisational politics and job performance

Definition of job performance as a variable in empirical research and its acclaimed relevance in the field of industrial or organisational psychology (Sonnetag and Frese, 2002) differs across researchers. Viswesvaran (2001) attributes this dissimilarity to the characteristic of it being an abstract and latent construct with many manifestations: a notion supported by Motowidlo (2003). This

study however focused on the definition of JP based on two dimensions; mainly task performance (TP) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). TP as defined by Borman and Motowidlo (1997) has as many as five dimensions, being (1) job-specific task proficiency, (2) non-job-specific task proficiency, (3) written and oral communication proficiency, (4) supervision in the case of a supervisory or leadership position and partly (5) management. In contrast to TP, voluntary behaviors that are deviant and damaging to the organisational goals are also deemed as a part of performance, but as a negative form of it (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; O'Brien and Allen, 2008). Such dysfunctional behaviors are generally labeled as counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). CWB refers to actions that adversely affect the well-being of the organisation (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). For the purpose of this study the construct of CWB has been reversed to make it in positive form. Deriving from the aforementioned notions the measures of JP in this study is based on the combination of both TP and CWB constructs. Rotundo and Sackett (2002) assert that organisational performance is a result of accumulated individual performances. Hence, high organisational performance implies high level of job performance from each of its employees and vice versa. Job performance, on the other hand, has been proven to be affected by multitude of factors. Among these factors is OP, whereby empirical studies found that OP has negatively affects job performance (Kacmar et al., 1999; Ferris et al., 2002; Rosen et al., 2006). This simply means that the higher the level of OP will result in lower level of job performance, and thus the lower the level of OP will mean the higher job performance magnitude. Therefore, it is hypothesized that OP will be negatively related to JP.

Purpose of study

The main purpose of this study was to empirically examine the relationship between organisational politics and its components or dimensions with job performance (JP). It also examined the most prevailing aspect of OP that influences JP among civil servant in Malaysia. Consequently, this study sought to test the following hypotheses:

H₁: There is a negative and significant relationship between general political behavior (GPB) and job performance.

H₂: There is a negative and significant relationship between going along to get ahead (GATGA) and job performance.

H₃: There is a negative and significant relationship between pay and promotion policies (PPP) and job performance).

H₄: There is a negative and significant relationship between overall organisational politics (OP) and job

Table1. Background characteristics of the respondent.

Variable	n	%
Age		
< 30 years old	122	34.9
> 30 - 40 years old	132	37.8
> 40 - 50 years old	55	15.8
> 50 years old	4	11.5
Gender		
Male	141	40.4
Female	208	59.6
Marital status		
Single	106	30.4
Married	238	68.2
Others	5	1.4
Education level		
Malaysian certificate or equivalent	10	2.9
Other certificate	5	1.4
Diploma or equivalent	54	15.5
Bachelor degree	183	52.4
Masters degree and above	97	27.8

Mean=35.10; Std. Dev= 9.10

performance.

H₅: There is a significant contribution of OP components (GPB, GATGA and PPP) on job performance.

H₆: Going along to get ahead (GATGA) aspect of OP is the most important influence or prevailing factor to job performance.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling procedure

Data for this study was collected based on a multistage random sampling from 349 government civil servants in Malaysian public organisations. The response rate was 69.8% from the sample of 500 staff. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test and answer the hypotheses and objectives of the study. The self-administered questionnaires obtained were then analyzed using SPSS (Special Package for Social Sciences) version 16. Factor analysis was conducted on OP scale to compare the dimensionality of this scale in this sample with the one proposed (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). From the preliminary analysis, it was found that the subjects to items ratio for this variable in the study were correlated with other item at least 0.5 or more in magnitude value and within the acceptable magnitude value.

Measures

Independent variables

The independent variables of this study were organisational politics (overall OP) and its components or dimensions of general political

behavior (GPB); going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP). Organisational politics perceived by the respondents in this study were gauged using perceptions organisational politics scale (POPS) which was adapted from an instrument developed (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). The POPS were used to measure OP which contains 15 items and can be divided into three components mainly GPB (two items), GATGA (seven items) and PPP (six items). The items of this scale were measured using five-point Likert scale (with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Dependent variable

Job performance (JP) was measured based on the combination of two components of task performance (TP) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The seven-item measures of task performance was adapted from Williams and Anderson's (1991) based on the scale of 1 = never, 2 = hardly ever, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often. Meanwhile counterproductive work behaviors questionnaire developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was adapted in the study. Respondents were given a five-point Likert scale of 1 = never, 2 = hardly ever, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often. The dependent variable of the study was the score of TP and CWB.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' profile

Table 1 presents the profile of respondents in the study. As shown in Table 1, majority (68.2%) of the respondents

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities and correlation coefficients of the main variables in the study.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1	2.75	0.61	(0.89)				
2	2.52	0.93	0.25**	(0.73)			
3	3.81	0.75	0.35**	0.54**	(0.84)		
4	2.32	0.70	0.18**	0.48**	0.29**	(0.86)	
5	3.53	0.62	-0.38**	-0.25**	-0.33**	-0.25**	(0.84)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, (Alpha reliability values are shown in parenthesis on the diagonal). 1 = Overall OP; 2 = general political behavior (GPB); 3 = going along to get ahead (GATGA); 4 = pay and promotion policies (PPP) and 5 = job performance (JP).

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis of GPB, GATGA and PPP on job performance.

Predictor	Job performance (Std Beta)
GPB	-0.054
GATGA	-0.263***
PPP	-0.127***
R ²	0.185***
ΔR^2	0.129***

*** $p < 0.001$. GPB = general political behavior, GATGA = going along to get ahead and PPP = pay and promotion policies

are married and nearly one-third (30.4%) of respondents are single. Female made up 59.6% of the sample while 40.4% are male. The youngest respondent is 21 years old (one person) while the oldest of them are 56 years (four people). Meanwhile, the age group that has the highest percentage is 30 to 39 years old with 37.8%, followed by below 30 years (34.9%). Slightly more than half of the respondents (52.4%) have bachelor's degree as their highest level of academic qualification and 27.8% have at least obtained a masters' degree.

Relationship between GPB, GATGA, PPP and overall OP with JP (H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄)

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations and alpha reliabilities of the variable measures in this study. The reliability analysis reveals that all scales are at the acceptable magnitude value of more than 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The coefficients value as shown in Table 2, found that all of the hypothesized relationships were supported. Specifically, the H₁ which stated that general political behavior (GPB) would be negatively related to JP (job performance) that is supported (beta = -0.25, $p < 0.01$). This is followed by variables of going along to get ahead (GATGA), pay and promotion policies (PPP) and overall OP that indicated a negative and significant relationship with JP. The coefficient values of the variables are: GATGA (beta = -0.33, $p < 0.01$), PPP (beta = -0.25, $p < 0.01$) and for overall

OP (beta = -0.38, $p < 0.01$). The data provided support for the hypothesis H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄, therefore these hypotheses are accepted.

The contribution of GPB, GATGA and PPP on job performance (H₅)

The H₅ of the study was to determine the contribution of OP components (GPB, GATGA and PPP) on job performance. From the multiple regression analysis (Table 3), it was found that on overall, the variables have contributed significantly to JP. The R² value of 0.185 indicated that 18.5% of variance in job performance was explained by components of OP (GPB, GATGA and PPP). However, by examining each individual component of OP as tabulated in Table 3, the analysis revealed that only two components mainly GATGA ($\beta = -0.263$) and PPP's ($\beta = -0.127$) have contributed to job performance as they were significant at 0.5. Meanwhile component GPB ($\beta = -0.054$) was not significant at 0.01. Data in for the H₅ did not provide support for the hypothesis. Thus the H₅ of this study was partially accepted.

The most prevailing aspect of OP that influences job performance (H₆)

Multiple regression analysis (Table 3) was employed to answer the sixth hypothesis in this study. The hypothesis was to test the most prevailing or important component of OP that contributed significantly to JP. Prior to interpreting the results, an inspection was carried out to detect the multicollinearity of the data. From the inter-item correlation results (as provided in Table 2), it can be seen that the correlations among general political behavior (GPB), going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP) are acceptable as they are less than 0.70 and within the acceptable value (Pallant, 2001). Based on the multiple regression analysis of OP components for job performance, it was found that only GATGA and PPP were found to be statistically significant contributor to the equation as their beta values stand at $p < 0.001$. Meanwhile the beta value of GPB is larger than

0.05 as illustrated in Table 3, indicated no significant influence to JP. As the beta coefficient of GATGA ($\beta=0.263$) is larger than PPP's ($\beta=-0.127$), it means that GATGA contributed most significantly to the job performance equation. The data proved that the H5 of the study is supported. This means that GATGA emerged as the strongest and unique contribution in explaining JP. This implied that GATGA is the most prevailing aspect of OP that influenced JP. The H6 of the study therefore is accepted.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between OP components of general political behavior (GPB), going along to get ahead (GATGA), pay and promotion policies (PPP) and overall OP with JP. It also determined the contribution of GPB, GATGA and PPP on Job performance. Consequently, it examined the most prevailing aspect of OP that influenced JP. The study found that all components of OP mainly GPB, GATGA, PP and overall OP were negatively and significantly related to JP. These results were consistent with previous studies (Aryee et al., 2004; Byrne, 2005; Chen and Fang, 2007; Zivnuska et al., 2004), therefore provide further evidence that OP has direct influences on the job performance of civil servants in Malaysia. As such, leaders in the civil service must recognize that organisational politics will subsequently harm the organisation. Hence, measures must be taken to minimize perceptions of OP amongst the civil servants such as by providing clear and accurate performance assessments, empowering subordinates where possible, promoting workplace openness and fostering appropriate freedom of ideas. At macro level, effective communication must be adopted to minimize misinterpretations and adverse perceptions among employees.

The results indicated that GPB, GATGA and PPP have contributed about 18.5% of variance on JP. GPB however indicates no influence on JP. Only GATGA and PPP have an influence on JP. As predicted, the study found that the GATGA component of OP has the highest contribution in explaining the variations of JP and emerged as the most prevailing factor to JP. This finding implied that more efforts should be directed at minimizing the GATGA component if the organisation aims at promoting JP. This finding suggests that management should not take lightly the GATGA aspect as it would influence JP in workplace. Hence, GATGA could be considered as one of the potential variables to be integrated in OP studies or model and to be applied in management practices with improvements in the construct. This is the first issue dealt with in this study that has not been emphasized in earlier studies especially Malaysian public organisations. Previous studies were regularly conducted in western setting. The study revealed here, demonstrates that western management

and organisational theories could be valid in a non-western setting and the findings found in a certain society might be evident in a different society.

The results of this study have shown a remarkable leading factor in assessing the OP outcomes of civil servants in Malaysia. Since the study was conducted in public sector and based on cross sectional nature of study, the external validity of the results may be somewhat limited. The study proposes that future research should consider experimental or longitudinal approach and other consideration in terms of subject and setting of the study. A longitudinal approach may help in improving one's ability to make causal statements. Factors such as organisational, personal, occupational and cultural elements that may influence OP should be explored for further research. However, this study serves as a departure for future studies of OP as it is an initiative towards a greater understanding of organisational attitudes and behaviors particularly on organisational politics and job performance in the global business.

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