The Influence of Perception of Organizational Politics on Employee Job Involvement and Turnover Intentions: Empirical Evidence from Ghanaian Organizations

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Abstract

Organizational politics is an integral part of organizational life, and a politically charged organization is discouraging to work in. In view of this, the study investigated the influence of perception of organizational politics on employee's work-related outcomes like job involvement and turnover intentions using banks, telecommunication and insurance companies in the Ghanaian business industry. Data were collected from 138 participants of eight (8) service-oriented Ghanaian organizations. Bivariate analysis showed that, perceptions of organizational politics was positively and significantly related to job involvement (r=.376, p<0.05) However, no significant relationship was found between perception of organizational politics and turnover intentions (r=.096, p<0.05). The implications and limitations of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: perception of organizational politics, job involvement, turnover intentions, Ghanaian organizations

1. Introduction

Organizations are made up of individuals with different beliefs, values, ideas, and attitudes and these differences influence the way these individuals interpret events in the organization. These differences feed into the subjective interpretation associated with organizational events like politics (Silvester, 2008). Accordingly, organizations have been characterized as political arenas (Mintzberg, 1983). Organizations that are rife with politics provide an uncomfortable environment for people to work in, and not good for promoting positive work-related behaviours (Poon, 2002). Organizational politics has been found to be positively associated with psychological variables like job stress (Ferris et al., 1996; Kacmar et al., 1999) and negatively with employee attitudes like job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Kacmar et al., 1999; Witt et al., 2000), employee performance such as self-reported performance, supervisor-rated performance, organizational citizenship behaviours and company performance (Kacmar et al., 1999; Witt et al., 1998; Vigoda, 2000b; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). Though numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the link between organizational politics and employee work-related variables, inconsistent findings have been reported. Also, empirical evidence from Ghana is non-existent. Further, organizational politics is a potential source of stress and naturally creates an unpalatable atmosphere for people to work. Thus, the study examined the relationship between organizational politics, job involvement and turnover intentions to see how politics affect these variables in the Ghanaian context.

2. Statement of Problem

Politics is a fact of life in organizations. People who ignore this fact of life do so at their own peril. This means that politics in organizations is a reality and therefore largely seen as a necessary evil. Thus, organizational politics is a prevalent element of virtually all work environments, and its influence has been substantiated across a variety of domains (Kacmar & Baron, 1999). It has been viewed negatively (Ferris et al, 1989), neutrally (Pfeffer, 1981), or positively (Hochwarte, Perrewê, Ferris, & Guerico, 1999).

Several studies have found perceptions of politics to have a negative influence on a number of organizational outcomes, including job anxiety (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Valle & Perrewe, 2000), job involvement (Cropanzano et al, 1997), job satisfaction (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Nye & Witt, 1993; Valle & Perrewe, 2000), intent to turnover (Witt, 1999), and employee performance (Kacmar et al, 1999; Witt, 1998). Thus organizational politics has a tremendous negative effect on employees work

outcomes and the purpose of this present study is to find out the extent to which workplace spirituality and trait cynicism can moderate the influence of politics perceptions on employees work outcomes, specifically, job involvement and turnover intention.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between perception of organizational politics and job involvement.
2. To determine the relationship between perception of organizational politics and turnover   intentions.

Literature Review

Perception of Organizational Politics

The phenomenon or organizational politics was first brought to academic literature by Burns (1967, p. 257). In the view of Burns (1967) politics occurs when others are made use of as resources in competitive situation. Since then the construct has been conceptualized differently by preceding scholars. For instance, Mays and Allen (1977) defined organizational politics as the management of influence to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned influence means. Similarly, Ferris et al. (1989) opined that politics is a social influence in which behaviour is strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest, which is either consistent with or at the expense of others interest (p. 145). In line with the above theoretical definitions, the researcher view organizational politics as a behaviour, formal or informal that is motivated by self-interest, executed with the sole purpose to satisfy individual interest now or in the future.

Turnover Intentions

A stressful work environment naturally creates behavioural intentions among the workforce. According to Whiteman (1999), turnover intention has to do with an employee thoughts regarding voluntarily leaving his or her present organization. Dolcos (2006) intimated that, turnover intention is the step that occurs immediately before an employee call it quit. Intention to leave has been a major source of concern for employers because it is a direct predictor of behaviours like attendance, turnover and organizational citizenship behaviours (Schalk & Freese, 1997). Increasing levels of unemployment as well as uncertainty in getting a better place to work has been assigned as reasons why people fear to quit their organizations (Dolcos, 2006). Thus, in people's mind, the thought is "this is not the right place for me to work" but because the unemployment situation such intentions are sometimes significantly lowered as it may affect one's input and subsequently output.

Turnover in organizations also influence retained employees negatively. For instance, it results in decreased employee commitment and increase burnout which could result in additional turnover (Castle, 2006).

Job Involvement

Job involvement is a positive workplace behaviour perceived to be an important determinant of organizational effectiveness (Pfeffer, 1994). Dubins (1968) characterized job involvement as a situation in which the individual likens the job to his or her life. Similarly, Allport (1943) view job involvement as the degree to which the individual employee perceives his or her job performance as central to his or her self-concept or self-esteem. Job involvement can also be defined as an individual's ego involvement with work (Kanungo, 1982). The job involvement is thus premised on the notion that being involved in one's job has the propensity to increase motivational processes which in turn influence job performance and other relevant outcomes like turnover intentions and absenteeism (Diefendorff, Brown, Kamin & Lord, 2002).

Perception of Organizational Politics and Job Involvement

Research evidence on the link between perception of organizational politics and job involvement has been substantiated by scholars albeit inconsistent findings. Cropanzano et al (1997) reported a negative association

between politics and job involvement (r=-.33, p<0.05) based on a study comprising 69 employees made up of 53 line workers, 10 supervisors, and 6 individuals who were neither supervisors nor subordinates of a manufacturing organization located in the Southwest of the United States. In another study involving 185 employees pursuing a part-time undergraduate programme in introductory and advanced psychology course in a large public Western University, the researchers obtained a significant negative relationship (r=-.18, p<0.05). Similarly, Danish (2000) reported a significant negative relationship between politics perceptions and job involvement (r= -.434, p<0.05) in a survey involving employees from several sectors of the economy such as financial, manufacturing, energy, civil service, agriculture and marketing organizations studying in part-time classes in a Business Institute of Lahore City of Pakistan. However, Ferris and Kacmar (1992) in a study involving 264 employees from three different organizations in which a one-time measure of perception of political behaviour was taken found a significant positive relationship between politics and job involvement. They indicated that, people try to escape the politics by burying themselves into work. Despite this, Brown's (1996) in a meta-analysis also reported a non-significant relationship between politics and job involvement. These inconsistent findings provided fertile grounds for more investigations into the link between politics and job involvement in other settings, especially Ghana.
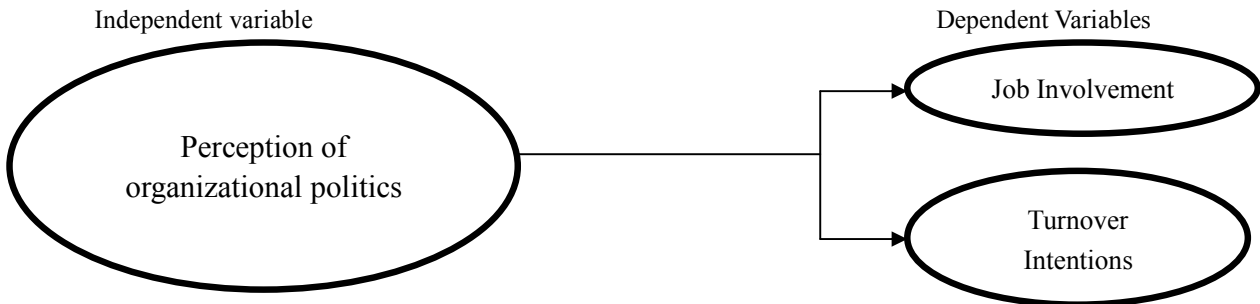
Perception of Organizational Politics and Turnover Intentions

Ferris et al (1989) intimated that high level of organizational politics is likely to create a certain level of disillusionment strong enough to fuel higher intentions of leaving an organization. Despite this assertion, empirical evidences have shown that it is not all the time that higher levels of organizational politics lead to intentions of leaving of organization. This is against the backdrop that inconsistent findings of this relationship have been observed. For instance, positive association between the two constructs have been reported (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Danish, 2000; Kacmar et al., 1999; Miller, Rutherford & Kolodinsky, 2008; Poon, 2003; Rozhan, 2008; Valle & Perrewe, 2000), no effect at all (e.g. Cropanzano et al., 1997; Harrel-Cooke et al. 1999; Hochwarter et al., 1999), or even a negative effect (Larwood et al., 1998). For instance, Rozhan (2008) in a study to determine the role of justice, trust and job ambiguity on perception of organizational politics, found a significant positive relationship between perception of organizational politics and turnover intentions based on a sample of 190 employees from a Malaysian finance company undergoing a turnaround (r=.272, p<0.05). In another study involving 69 participants made up of 53 line workers, 10 supervisors and 6 individuals working in a manufacturing organization located in the Southwest of the United States, the researchers obtained a significant positive relationship between perception of organizational politics and turnover intentions (r=.49, p<0.05) (Cropanzano et al., 1997). They also reported a significant positive relationship between perceived organizational politics and turnover intentions (r=.29, p<0.05)in a study involving 185 employees on a part-time undergraduate programme in a large Public Western University. Poon (2003) in a study involving 208 full-time working adults made up of 132 men and 76 women in two large public Universities in Malaysia from a wide range of occupations including administrative, managerial, professional and technical jobs in various functional areas of organizations, examined situational antecedents and outcomes of organizational politics perception. The study found organizational politics to significantly and positively predict turnover intentions (b=0.21, p<.01).

Statement of Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant negative relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and employee job involvement.
2. There will be a significant positive relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and turnover intentions

Summary of the Relationship between Independent Variable and Dependent Variables

Independent variable

Dependent Variables

Perception of
organizational politics

Job Involvement

Turnover
Intentions

Methodology

Research design

A survey design was used to investigate the influence of the independent variable (perception of organizational politics) on the two dependent variables (job involvement and turnover intentions). A purely quantitative approach was adopted in this study because numeric data was collected using questionnaire.

Sample size and sampling techniques

A two-stage sampling procedure was adopted in this study. The first stage involved selection of organizations while the second stage involved selection of the participants. Stratified sampling method was used to select the organizations. Thus, the organizations were divided into two stratum, public sector organizations and private sector organizations. The participants however were selected using convenience sampling method. 138 participants were involved in the study. The distribution of participants in terms of sex, age, and tenure is presented in the Table below. In addition, the representation of organizations in terms of percentage of public and private sector organizations is presented.

Demographic characteristics of Respondents

Demographic variables	N	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	78	56.5
Female	68	43.5
Sector		
Public	81	58.7
Private	57	41.3
Age		
Above 40years	24	17.4
Between 30 – 40years	61	44.2
Below 30years	53	38.4
Job Position		
Management level	38	27.5
Below management level	100	72.5
Tenure		
10 years and above	24	17.4
Below 10 years	114	82.6
Total Number of Respondents (N = 138)		

Instruments/Measures

Perception of organizational politics was measured using a 12-item scale by Ferris and Kacmar (1991). This scale was found to have an acceptable reliability in Poons' study (2003). In Poon's study, the scale yielded a reliability of .90. Sample items on the scale are "people in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down", and "employees are encouraged to speak up out frankly even when they are critical of well-established ideas".

The statements on this scale was based on a 5-point likert format ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Lodahl and Kejner (1965) 20-item job involvement scale was used to measure job involvement based on a 5-point likert format ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). It has a cronbach alpha value of .76.

Finally, Kelloway, Gottlieb and Barham (1999) turnover intention scale was used to measure turnover intentions in the study. In Esson's study (2004), this scale was found to have a reliability value of .76. Responses were based on a 7-point format ranging from extremely likely (7) to extremely unlikely (1).

Data Collection Procedure

In accordance with the principles governing research ethics, permission was officially obtained from the Human Resource department of the selected organizations involved in the study.   Questionnaires were administered by hand. Since the researcher did not pick the questionnaire directly from participants, each questionnaire was accompanied by an envelope into which participants were instructed to place completed questionnaires into and seal. This was done to ensure that the promise of confidentiality was adhered to as well as make it possible for only the researcher to be the only one apart from the participants preview to the information provided.

Pilot Study

An initial study was conducted to determine the suitability, clarity and understandability of the items on the research instruments used in the study. In view of this, the instruments were pre-tested on a convenient sample of 20 participants drawn from the banking, insurance and telecommunication industry in Ghana. The results following the pilot study showed that, participants generally understood all the items on the three instruments. The reliability values of the instruments also met the accepted threshold recommended by Nunnally (1978). The reliability values and number of items and name of the instruments used is shown in the Table below.

Scale	No. of Items	Alpha (α)
Organizational politics	10	.76
Job involvement	20	.70
Turnover intentions	4	.71

Results

Data analysis was facilitated with the Statistical Product and Services Solution (SPSS) version 16.0 for windows. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviation scores were computed for the independent and dependent variables. Mean and standard deviation scores are presented in Table below

Summary of Means and Standard Deviation Scores of Variables		
Variables	Mean	SD
Organizational politics	36.913	6.958
Job involvement	61.116	5.692
Turnover intentions	16.196	2.771

The hypotheses were tested using bivariate correlation. This analysis was done to determine the direction of the relationship, strength of the relationship and amount of shared variance between the two variables. The results showed that, organizational politics was significantly and positively associated with job involvement (r=.376, n=138, p<.05). This finding disagreed with the hypothesis that, organizational politics will relate negatively and significantly to job involvement. Based on the prescriptions for determining the strength of the relationship, a significant but moderate/medium relationship was found between perception of organizational politics and job involvement (Cohen, 1988). The correlation of r=.376 shows that, perception of organizational politics helps to explain 75 percent of the variance in job involvement.

The prediction that, organizational politics will relate positively and significantly to turnover intentions was not supported (r=.096, n=138, p>.05). This shows that, increasing levels of organizational politics was not associated with increasing intentions to leave and vice versa. This shows that there is a small and insignificant relationship between perception of organizational politics and turnover intentions (Cohen, 1988) with perception of organizational politics explaining 19 percent of the variance in turnover intentions. See Table below for details.

Bivariate Correlation between Organizational Politics, Job Involvement and Turnover Intentions

	1	2	3
Organizational politics	-		
Job involvement	.376[***]	-	-
Turnover intentions	.096	-	-

Discussion

The study investigated the influence of organizational politics on job involvement and turnover intentions in Ghanaian organizations. In line with this, the direct relationship between organizational politics and job involvement and turnover intention was examined. Contrary to the expectation of the study, organizational politics was found to be negatively associated with employee job involvement. This finding contradicted the outcome reported by Danish (2000) but consistent with Ferris and Kacmar (1992) observation. Like Ferris and Kacmar (1992), employee's level of job involvement tends to increase in the face of increasing levels of organizational politics because by involving themselves deeply into work, they escape from the harm that politics would have caused. Also, since a politically charged work environment is a recipe for job insecurity, one can also guarantee his or her job by getting seriously involved in work.

No significant relationship was found between organizational politics and turnover intentions in the present study. This empirical evidence drawn from data from Ghanaian organizations contradicted previous findings. Notably, the result disagreed with the observations made by scholars (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Danish, 2000; Hochwarter et al., 1999; Kacmar et al., 1999; Poon, 2003; Valle & Perrewe, 2000). It is justifiable to say that, people only stick to an uncomfortable environment because of the scarcity of similar jobs or alternatively better work environments. This is also fuelled by the high level of graduate unemployment in Ghana.

Limitations

Like all previous studies in the area, this research is not without limitations. Correlational research design was used to investigate the link between the independent variable (organizational politics) and dependent variables (job involvement and turnover intentions). Though, significant correlation was obtained between organizational politics and job involvement, it does not suggest a causal relationship.

Contributions of the present study

Despite the above limitations, the study has major strengths. In particular this study has contributed to existing literature by filling gaps in organizational and management literature. In addition, the subjective nature of this research especially regarding the concept of organizational politics, the study collected data from several organizations. This makes findings in this study to a large extent generalizable to similar organizations within the Ghanaian setting and even beyond. Also, controls were established in this research to eliminate the tendency of other variables providing strong alternative explanations for findings in this study. For instance, sex, age, and affective disposition – positive affectivity and negative affectivity were controlled because of their previous relationships with perception of organizational politics.

Implications for Practice

What do the results obtained in this study suggest? The outcome of this study is relevant to management and leaders in organizations.

To control the potential dysfunctional consequences of perceived politics in organizations, management or leadership of organizations should encourage participation in decision making by the rank and file of the organizational

hierarchy especially performance related decisions. Again, as indicated by Ferris et al (1996), employees understanding of policies, procedures and critical decisions should be increased in order to reduce the effect of politics on them. Also, the management should consider creating a workplace climate that will discourage high perception of organizational politics. For instance, organizational environment that is characterized by ambiguity, suspicion, distrust tend to fuel high perception of politics by individual employees who are naturally predisposed to such environments.

Recommendation for Future Research

The outcome of this study has provided fertile grounds for extensive work in organizational politics to be conducted in Ghanaian organizations. Researchers could focus on variables like job position, job opportunities, and emotional intelligence as possible antecedents of organizational politics. Variables like unemployment rate in the country, organizational tenure and organizational type (i.e. public vs. private) could also be controlled in future studies.

Conclusion

The fact that organizational politics is an integral part of organizational life was manifested clearly in this study. The study revealed that organizational politics has a significant influence on some work-related attitudes. Evidence from this study suggests that, organizational politics has a significant and positive impact of job involvement. This means that though organizational politics is perceived as a stressor and therefore negatively affects good behaviours, in this case it let to high levels of involvement by employees. Thus, employees in Ghana use job involvement as an escape from the dangers of politics (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). The politics-job involvement relationship obtained in this study also draws our attention to the fact that, organizations in Ghana are charged politically and therefore capable of causing employees to burry themselves into their jobs in order to avoid the stress associated with political activities in organizations. The study also revealed a non-significant relationship between organizational politics and turnover intentions. This shows that, increasing levels of organizational politics was not associated with increasing intentions to leave organizations in Ghana. It is important to explore further the link between organizational politics and turnover intentions in Ghanaian organizations by isolating the influence of job opportunities especially external job opportunities in order to arrive at a clear link in the Ghanaian context.

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