
PERCEPTION OF WORKPLACE POLITICS AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM INFANT FIRMS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effect of perceived workplace politics on performance of employees of infant firms in Southwest Nigeria. The study's specific objectives were to gauge the correlation between perceived workplace politics and employee performance and analyze the effect of workplace politics on employee performance. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire. One hundred twelve employees of infant firms participated in the study. The study adopted mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression statistics for data analyses. The study found that perceived workplace politics relates to employee performance and concludes that perceived workplace politics affect employee performance. The study recommends that infant firms in Southwest Nigeria that desire improved employee performance should treat and compensate employees fairly. Moreover, infant firms in Southwest Nigeria should enforce rules and regulations guiding contractual agreements entered with employees without prejudice.

Keywords: Employee performance, infant firms, perceived workplace politics, task performance

INTRODUCTION

Workplace politics describes the processes and behaviours involving human interactions with respect to power and authority in the organization. It addresses the issues of who in an organisation has the power and resources, and how these resources are distributed without the use of force. Workplace politics is also a tool used to assess an organization's operational capacity and to balance divergent views and interests of organizational members. Gotsis and Kortezi (2011) conceive organizational politics as the acts of members of an organization pursuing their interests without taking into account how those interests may affect the organization's efforts to achieve its objectives. Politics is an inherent part of organizational life; and is commonly regarded as a power game. Weber (1947) described power as "the possibility

that one actor in a social connection will be able to carry out their own will despite resistance, independent of the basis on which this probability depends." Workplace politics influences and affects all aspects of an organization, including management systems, relationships, customs, processes, performance and outcomes (Lasswell, 1958). Also, politics is practiced at all levels of society, ranging from conventional cultures' clans and tribes through local governments, businesses, and organizations, to sovereign states.

Politics is significant because it reveals the secret of "who gets what, when, and how" in a social structure (Lasswell, 1958). Generally speaking, compromise and collaboration, conversation and debate, bribery and deception are all political methods to pressure opponents to accept an opinion. In modern organisations, individuals and groups use politics to achieve their objectives. This might be permitted or made lawful. Organizational politics enable workers to get benefits from employers. Politics in the workplace can benefit both the employees and their organisations. Political behaviours have become pervasive due to the involvement of people and the fact that organizations do not always have enough resources. However, politics in the workplace can be seen in one of two ways: either as a sign of effective social influence mechanisms that is advantageous to the organization or as a self-serving consequence that is detrimental to those objectives.

Workplace politics is believed to influence employee performance. Employee performance is viewed as employees' work output in a specified period and reference to stated goals or expectations. Employee performance is also a measure of how employees carry out their duties and their willingness to go above and beyond fundamental performance evaluation criteria for the company's benefit.

Sheard et al. (2011) assert that managers' leadership style and political orientation influence employee performance. Thus, workplace politics and related attitudes are thus considered vital predictors of employee performance and have received increased attention from scholars and business administrators. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the effects of perception of workplace politics on employees' performance in infant firms in Nigeria, given that limited empirical evidence exists in the literature about the interaction between these variables. The study focuses on determining the nexus between workplace politics and employee performance; and the effect of dimensions of workplace politics on employee performance. Besides contributing to the knowledge of workplace politics, the study will equip firms' operators to enshrine values that promote healthy workplace politics. The study represented workplace politics as "go along to get ahead," "general political behaviour," and "pay and promotion policies."

CONCEPT OF WORKPLACE POLITICS

Politics is a common occurrence in organizations that have attracted a wide range of definitions from scholars. Kacmar and Baron (1999) opined that politics at work are actions taken by people to reinforce their interests without considering the interests of others or their organization. In Ferris et al. (1989) view, organizational politics represents behaviour intended to maximize long-term or short-term self-interest in the workplace. The preceding suggests that workplace or organizational politics can be construed as methods of gaining power that does not rely on excellence or chance. Workplace politics can be perceived as the objective assessments of the

level of influence and power that organizational members utilize to gain an advantage and safeguard their interests.

Selfish behaviour is a common occurrence among employees. Such behaviours lead to small groups rarely caring about other people's needs. Behaviours in this wise can be termed negative and may harm others. Negative workplace politics fosters an unjust and unfair environment that disgruntles employees and may lead to turnover intentions. Quality decision-making, promotions, and rewards are impaired in such environments. Furthermore, workplace politics encumber employees to see inequality, unfairness, and information blocking. When not nipped timeously, negative organizational politics can increase employees' stress levels and turnover rate.

Perceived workplace politics is concerned with individuals' views of their self-interests relating to the activities or practices of others. These are commonly associated with manipulating corporate processes and frequently involve intimidating methods, even manipulating others for desired objectives (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). Therefore, perception of workplace politics may be a good indicator of the overall political climate of the organization as well as an essential dimension of individuals' perception of their organisation. Perceived organizational politics comprises three variables: go along to get ahead, general political behavior, and pay and promotion policy. Going along to get (GATGA) ahead involves purposefully being silent to protect entrenched interests or valued outcomes from loss (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). General political behaviour entails influencing people and events inside the organization to protect one's self-interests, meet one's needs, and achieve one's goals (Sinha, 2008). Finally, pay and Promotion Policies (PPP), the third variable, involve the organization behaving politically through its enacted policies (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991).

Employees' political behaviour is primarily influenced by reward systems (Muhammad & Nasreen, 2014). Employees will behave politically to advance their self-interest in firms where promotions and rewards are not determined by performance evaluations (Salam, 2016). Individuals are more likely to participate in organizational politics when they see that it produces better rewards (Muhammad & Nasreen, 2014). HRM systems may honour employees who exert influence over others and penalize employees who do not (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). In addition, an organizational climate that fosters political behaviours may harm employees who do not engage in political activity (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Additionally, perception of workplace politics negatively affects employee performance (Kacmar et al., 1999). The perception of company politics and job performance are negatively correlated (Vigoda, 2006). Employee job performance will decrease if internal politics are connected to a particular person since they will be pressured to leave their position (Vigoda, 2006).

Human behaviours at work have been a subject of interest. The nature of interpersonal interactions within organizations that motivates people to act in certain ways and the reasons conflicts arise in organizations has continued to pique the interests of scholars and business administrators. A common belief however, is that one behaviours that results to conflicts at work is perceived organizational politics (Vigoda, 2006). People purposefully damage one another to gain power in a political environment. Regular groupings are run in the struggle to control limited supplies, and organizations are the political battlefield where coalitions develop and break down in the pursuit of power (Vigoda, 2002 in Adebuseyi et al., 2013). Employees (as

political participants, observers of political activity, or affected third parties) view a situation from their point of view during this process, which may or may not correspond with the situation's realities. This is because people's responses, which are not always based on reality itself, support their perceptions of reality. Therefore, it can be inferred that politics among employees is a function of the attitude and perception of employees', which is invented from workplace political activities.

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Human resources are the catalyst in achieving organizational objectives. Thus, firms work to improve employees' performance and development. Performance is defined as the number and quality of labour outcomes that employees produce per their assigned responsibilities and stipulate requirements. Koopmans et al. (2014) describe individuals' performance as how employees operate within organizational contexts to achieve the aims and objectives of the organization. Employee performance is also referred to as job performance. However, organizational performance is frequently divided into job and organisational performance (Otley, 1999). Organisational performance is decided by the performance of its employees as well as other factors such as the firm's environment. The quality of the workplace setting speaks volumes about employee productivity. (Hunter 1986) differentiates between organizational and job performance, stating that organizational performance describes the efficiency with which corporate objectives are achieved or how the firm implements plans, while job performance is the sum of an employee's efforts. The present study focuses on the link between workplace politics and employee performance.

Employee performance is critical to a business since employee dedication, innovation, and creativity are essential to an organization's success. However, individual job performance can also be a multi-dimensional variable, including contextual performance, adaptive performance, and task performance (Koopmans et al., 2014). Task performance is an individual's ability to do the fundamental technical or substantive tasks required of their job (Koopmans et al., 2014). The contextual performance comprises behaviours that support the social, organizational, and psychological environments during which the technical core must operate (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993); while adaptive performance is the degree to which a person responds to changes in their job position or environment (Griffin, 2007) or the acquisition of new skills in response to changes in an organization.

Despite the concerted efforts by firms' leadership to eliminate workplace politics, its prevalence demonstrates that organizational members are constantly engaged in political manoeuvring. Employee performance in the organization is linked to organizational politics (Chen & Fang, 2007; Vigoda, 2000). Employees who do not participate in organizational politics may consider leaving the organisation. Kacmar and Carlson (1997) added that a high political environment limits the firm's resources and diminishes employee performance. Organizational politics influence how employees perceive spontaneous processes of competition and collaboration in firms and how those processes affect their performance at work (Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006).

Othman (2008) distinguishes between organisational politics' positive and negative sides in trust, justice, and job ambiguity. The negative side of organisational politics is characterized by illegal attitudes and favouritism, whereas the positive side is characterized by collective responsibility,

which is critical to firms' success. Furthermore, negative organizational politics is despised because it breeds problems and conflicts, while positive organizational politics is good because it is associated with common goals and inspirational teamwork (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY

This study is anchored on the theory of transformational leadership by Bernard Bass in 1990. The approach is an extension of transformational leadership propounded by James V. Downton in 1973. The theory suggests that leadership factors, such as idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, are essential leadership characteristics that transform individuals and organizations. Idealized influence or charisma is a trait that enables leaders to establish credibility with their team members. When pursuing their goals, charismatic leaders are persistent and determined, uphold the highest moral and ethical standards, sacrifice their interests for the benefit of those around them, prioritize their subordinates' needs above their own, and collaborate with them to share their successes and risks. Inspirational motivation is a leader's capacity to motivate followers by offering significantly challenging work. Passionate leaders raise team spirit and elicit eagerness and optimism from followers. In conveying expectations and displaying commitment to goals and a shared vision, inspirational leaders help subordinates to envisage desirable future statuses. Intellectual stimulation is leaders' ability to encourage followers to be inventive and innovative by challenging assumptions, redefining difficulties, and addressing normal circumstances in novel ways. Intellectually stimulating leaders inspire employees to try new things while emphasizing logic. Individualized consideration concentrates on each person's need for achievement and growth; leaders establish a respectful relationship with each individual and raise their subordinates to greater levels of capability in a nurturing environment. Individualized consideration acknowledges individuals' diversity in wants and preferences. Transformational leadership theory is relevant to the present study as it supports training and retaining highly inspiring managers who embrace teamwork with excellent communication, collaboration, and integration of ideas, which is capable of draining the adverse effects of workplace politics on employee job performance.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON PERCEIVED WORKPLACE POLITICS AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Extant literature shows that several studies have been conducted on workplace politics and employees' performance, with results showing different levels of agreement on the influence of workplace politics and employees' performance. For example, Vigoda-Gadot's (2006) study found a negative association between employees' perceived organisational politics and performance. The study showed that organisational politics results in lower employee commitment and satisfaction, manifesting in employee actions like intention to leave the organisation, absenteeism, and information blockage. In addition, perceived organisational politics undermine organizational goals if personal interests are favoured (Vigoda, 2000).

Folge et al. (1992) argue that poor perceptions of organisational politics lead to discontent because employees perceive that they work in an unfair and unjust setting. Therefore, they are obliged to resign from their department or the firm. Karatepe (2013) found that employees are dissatisfied and demonstrate lower work involvement if their opinion of organisational politics

affects job promotions and incentives. Olorunleke (2015) found that workplaces devoid of politics showed improved job performance and staff decision-making ability, reaching corporate goals. Nadeem et al. (2015) assert that improved work satisfaction, performance, and reduced absenteeism/ staff turnover are envisaged in a work atmosphere devoid of politics.

Abbas and Raja (2014) in their study on organizational politics in Pakistan revealed that employees' impression of the level of politics in their work environment lead to a decline in innovative and positive behaviours. This is a pointer that perceived organizational politics had a detrimental impact on innovative work performance among employees. Gadot (2007) contends that that workplace politics has both direct and beneficial relationship with employee performance; and that employees show a high level of commitment to work based on their perception of friendliness or hostility in the workplace.

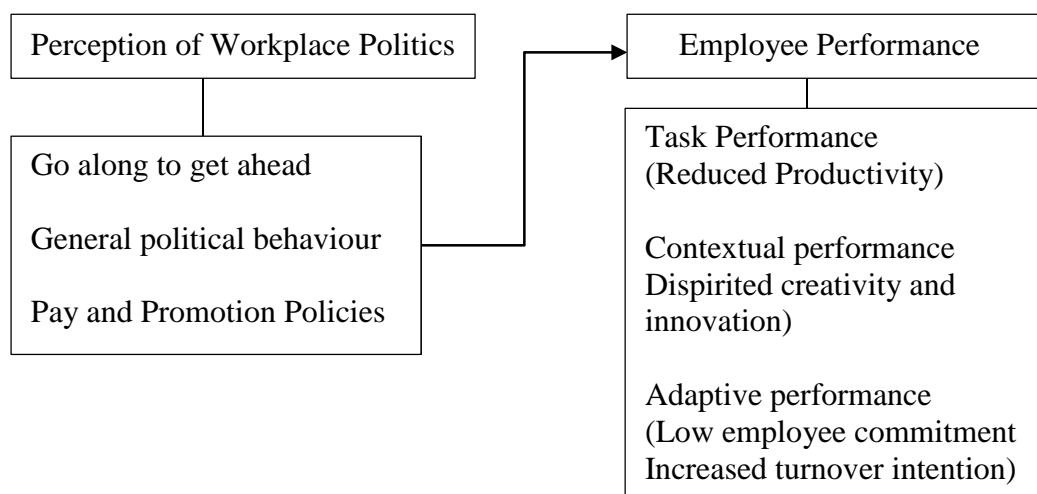


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of perception of workplace politics and job performance

Source: Researcher, 2022

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on examining perceived workplace politics and employee performance. This study was conducted in Southwest Nigeria, comprising Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, and the Oyo States. The population of the study consists of employees of infant firms in southwest Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design and collected primary data using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed on the Likert 5-point scale where: Strongly agreed (5), Agreed (4), Undecided (3), Disagreed (2), and strongly disagreed (1). The questionnaire was designed to elicit data on the perceived workplace politics and employee performance. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section one focused on the demographics of respondents, while Section two focused on perceived workplace politics and employee performance. One hundred twelve respondents selected through purposive sampling served as test units. The reliability of the research instrument was ascertained through the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test. Table 1 below displays the summary of the results of the test.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Perception of workplace politics	.979	9
Employee Performance	.951	9

Source: Authors' computation (2022).

Data analyses were done using mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression statistics.

RESIULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis on Perception of Workplace Politics and Job Performance

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
Perception of workplace Politics					
Go along to get ahead	112	6.0893	.30403	3.21750	10.352
General Political Behaviour	112	6.00	.33920	3.58980	12.887
Pay and Promotion Policies	112	6.0357	.32236	3.41150	11.638
Job Performance					
Contextual Performance	112	5.9464	.34709	3.67323	13.493
Adaptive Performance	112	7.9464	.26449	2.79910	7.835
Task Performance	112	5.5714	.30957	3.27622	10.734

Source: Authors' computation, 2022

Table 3: Correlation between Perceived Workplace Politics and Employee Performance

		Employee Performance
Go along to get ahead	Pearson Correlation	.953**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	112
General Political Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.922**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	112
Pay and Promotion Policies	Pearson Correlation	.958**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	112

Source: Authors' computation (2022)

Table 3 shows the correlation results between perceived workplace politics (represented as go along to get ahead, general political behaviour and pay and promotion policies) and employee performance. The results show a correlation between factors of perceived workplace politics and employee performance. Going along to get ahead ($r = 0.953$, $p = 0.000$); general political behaviour ($r = 0.922$, $p = 0.000$); pay and promotion policies ($r = 0.958$, $p = 0.000$). This implies that perceived workplace politics has a solid relationship with employee performance. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient suggests that the relationship between the variables is positive, while the probability value of 0.000 produced by the correlation is less than 0.05.

Table 4: Regression Analysis on Influence of Perceived Workplace Politics on Employees Performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	2.308	.468		4.929	.000
	Go along to get ahead	1.590	.217	.548	7.319	.000
1	General Political Behaviour	-.652	.232	-.250	-2.811	.006
	Pay and Promotion Policies differential	1.869	.231	.683	8.087	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

Table 5: Analysis of Variance of Workplace Politics on Employee Performance

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	9151.469	3	3050.490	621.154	.000b
Residual	530.388	108	4.911		
Total	9681.857	111			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Pay and Promotion Policies, Go along to get ahead, General Political Behaviour

From the analysis performed on the effect of workplace politics as an omnibus concept on employee performance shown in table 5 above, workplace politics has a statistically significant effect on job performance (R square = 0.945, Adjusted R square = 0.944, P= 0.000). We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

To establish the different effects of factors of perceived workplace politics on employee performance, a regression analysis was carried out. The result shows the factors of perceived workplace politics have statistically significant effect on employee performance - general political behaviour (B = -0.652 P=0.006); going along to get ahead (B = 1.869, P =0.000); pay and Promotion Policies (B = 1.590, P =0.000).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the effect of perceived workplace politics on employee performance. The analysis of the data obtained from respondents showed that workplace politics is widespread in Nigerian Infant firms investigated. Some factors that trigger workplace politics include abuse of authority for self-benefit, awful limitation of resources, inadequate management control, favouritism, exchange of favour for mutual gains, inadequate workloads, and rewards system. It was also found that workplace politics, in its different ramifications, slows employee performance and discourages creativity. These findings confirm the result of Folger et al. (1992) that perceived organizational politics give employees the impression that they work in an unfair and unjust environment, leading to dissatisfaction and intention to leave the organization.

The study also found out a statistically significant correlation between factors of perceived workplace politics and employee performance - go along to get ahead ($r = 0.953$, $p = 0.000$); general political behaviour ($r = 0.922$, $p = 0.000$); pay and promotion policies ($r = 0.958$, $p = 0.000$). This outcome is in consonance with the results of Vigoda-Gadot, (2006) that an association exists between perceived organizational politics and organizational performance through employee satisfaction and commitment.

In addition, the study found that a statistically significant effect of factors of perceived workplace politics on employee performance - general political behaviour ($B = -0.652$, $p = 0.006$); go along to get ahead ($B = 1.869$, $p = 0.000$); pay and promotion policies ($B = 1.590$, $p = 0.000$). Perceived workplace politics significantly impact employee performance ($R^2 = 0.945$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.944$, $p = 0.000$). This finding aligns with the report of Karatepe (2013) that employee involvement reduces as a result of poor impressions of corporate politics and organizational culture.

This study examined perceived workplace politics on employee performance in the Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study used "go along to get ahead," "general political behaviour," as well as "pay and promotion policies to represent perceived workplace politics; while contextual performance, task performance, and adaptive performance were used as proxies of employee performance. The study found that perceived workplace politics relates to employee performance and concludes that perceived workplace politics affect employee performance. The study thus recommends that infant firms in Southwest Nigeria that desire improved employee performance should:

- 1) Treat employees fairly and compensate them based on the level of performance.
- 2) Enforce rules and regulations guiding contractual agreements entered with employees without prejudice.
- 3) Create appropriate working conditions that motivate employees to increase their performance.
- 4) Provide strong support for employees to carry out their duties and feel accepted in the organisation
- 5) Institute an all-inclusive rewards system that motivates employees to give their best.

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