Office Ecosystem: The Effect of Personal Attribute on Employees' Perception on Office Politics

Daud Z[a], Saiful Azizi I.[b], Mohd Rashdan S.[c], Rusli A.[d], [a,b,c]Universiti Utara Malaysia, School of Business Management, [d]Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Department of Human Resource Development, Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development,

Office politics has become a fuss in the office ecosystem. Nowadays, corporate offices suffer from the politics played by its employees to sometimes excel and most of the time to degrade others performance. Despite the immense efforts from management, this problem is incurable. This empirical paper attempts to find out if there are any demographic differences between the employees while engaging in such politics. From factor analysis result, office politics in this study is represented by the get-along-to-go-ahead dimension. This study has revealed that personal attributes have determined employees' perception of office politics. To this end, a conclusion is provided with certain recommendations on how to reduce the situation of office politics.

Key words: *employer-employees management, industrial relations, office ecosystem, a perception of office politics, personal attribute.*

Introduction

The employees' movement, culture, value and communication amongst individual in an organization creates a unique ecosystem.   The movement, communication between employees, culture, and the value of employees in an organization will create an office ecosystem.

 An office ecosystem creates issues that are always being discussed in industrial relations, a discipline that elaborates the relationship between employees and their employer in a workplace. Issues like discrimination, power abuse, fairness, and contract violations always create dispute and grievances in an organization. These issues sometimes are referring to as office politics.

A political game in an office may create a bad office ecosystem. Office politics refers to activities that portraying manipulation of power and abusing of power and authority to build a relationship to get things done or to achieve one's personal objective. Saiful Azizi Ismail and Daud (2015) stated that, in Malaysian organizations, office politics is manifested by activities such as "back-stabbing" and bullying other employees to achieve one's personal objectives. Office politics (which strictly only includes office workers, although the meaning is usually intended in the wider sense) is the use of one's individual assigned power for the purpose of obtaining advantages beyond one's legitimate authority (Parker, Dipboye, and Jackson, 1995). Those advantages may include access to tangible and intangible assets or benefits such as a status or pseudo-authority that influences the behaviour of others. Weissenberger (2010) stated that in the appearance of office politics, the competition of power exists.

This study also tries to provide some insight into the political behavior of the employees in order to survive in such an environment. Some preferred to be under the shadow of their perceived strong players and become their followers in order to feel safe. Since they themselves have accepted to be weak in the political front, they preferred to surrender in front of the strong players and become their follower. Others preferred to face the perceived political players by challenging them upfront. Those people who believed in office politics will politically dominate the environment and have control over others.

This paper discusses the experiences of the employees and their survival strategies while working in a politically influenced environment. The information is based on the perception and experiences of the employees in Malaysian Federal Agencies located in Kedah.

Office politics challenges

Office politics is a major issue in today's organizational behaviour because it involves individuals who manipulate their working relationships to discriminate against other employees and compete to gain resources for their own gain at the expense of the team or company. This situation causes problems for the individuals who work together and the end result can be far more devastating. Employees and managers who concentrate on the political aspects of work may have less time to pay attention to their jobs. A study by Ferris and Kachmar (1992) has shown that perception of politics predicted a reduction in job dissatisfaction among employees. In addition, Dhar (2009) has stated that organizational politics produced a threat to staff retention and work productivity.

Different employees have different views about politics in an organization. Political influence may also be used to maintain the status quo when change is guaranteed. Whether political behaviour proves beneficial or harmful to the organization may depend more on how that behaviour is perceived rather than the reality (Parker, Dipboye, Jackson, 1995). However, most literature on office politics has shown that office politics brings bad perception amongst employees.

Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, and Anthony (1999) stated that intent to turnover and low job satisfaction are among the consequent outcomes from organizational politics. As most of the office political game occurs at a managerial level, thus, it becomes vital to study the effect of an employee's personal attributes on their perception of office politics.

Overview of the Literature
Office Ecosystem

The office ecosystem involves a relationship between employees sharing the same work culture and values; and teamwork in an organization. Teamwork is an essential part of workplace success. Each employee must work together to set up the perfect working performance, thus, every team member has a specific role to play in accomplishing his tasks on the job. Although it may seem that an organization is successfully achieving its mission, it was made possible by employees' effective planning, coordination, and cooperation to get their respective jobs done. Employers look for people who do not only know how to work well with others, but also understand that not every employee on the team can or will be the one who gets the job done. Everybody in an organization must able to works together to accomplish the organization's objectives.

Teamwork involves building relationships and working with other people using a number of important skills and habits including working cooperatively; contributing to groups with ideas; suggestions and effort; communication effectively (both giving and receiving); sense of responsibility; healthy respect for different opinions, customs, and individual preferences; and ability to participate in group decision-making. Unfortunately, in some organizations employees tend to play politics so that they can be seen as an important playmaker for the organization's success.

Office politics

It was indicated that in an organization, office politics activities always creates conflicts. Stress and negative social behaviours are the indicators to for bad office politics (Chang, Rosen and Levy, 2009; Mungwari, 2018). Employees will feel stressful, frustrated and demotivated if they become the victim of negative office politics activities. This is due to the fact that political behaviour encompasses those activities, for instance, power abuse and bullying, that is not required to perform one's formal role in the organization. The organizational climate survey, performed by Parker, Dipboye, and Jackson (1995), suggested that organizational politics is an important dimension of peoples' perception on a work environment, that has a stronger relationship with role conflict (Chang, Rosen and Levy, 2009). The authors also revealed that perceptions of office politics have a strong, positive relationship with strain and turnover intention; and negative relationships with job satisfaction and affective commitment. In particular, perceptions of office politics were associated with increased psychological strain, which associated directly with a reduction in work performance, as well as indirectly will increase turnover intentions through reduction of morale (Saiful Azizi Ismail and Daud, 2015).

Sometimes office politics is also referring to as office bullying. It may manifest in a form of discrimination, for example, sabotaging employee's performance appraisal, the denial of promotion and performance related pay awards and, sometimes driving employees who are considered threats and burdens out of their job.

Personal attribute

Personal attributes may be different among employees. It is influenced by their values, culture, attitude, and perception. Sharma and Mohapatra (2009) indicated that a person's attributes can be conceptualized by his biological, social, psychological and spiritual being. Wakou, Keim, and Williams (2003) defined personal attributes as values, belief, attitudes, interests or behaviour that ones have before being hired by the organization. Robbins (2001)

indicated that an individual's attributes is determined by internal and external circumstances. An internal attribute is controlled by the individual personally, while external attributes are caused by an action where an individual is forced into the behaviour by the external situation. Personal attributes are elaborated by attribution theory. This theory defines that when individuals observe behaviour, they attempt to determine whether it is internally or externally caused (Robbins, 2001). Attribution theory is determined by three factors; distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency. Distinctiveness refers to whether an individual reacts to different behaviours in different situations. Consensus states that different individuals react to similar behaviour in a similar situation. Consistency refers to whether a person is given the same reaction for the same given situations overtime (Robbins, 2001). Hence, this study examined employees' perception of office politics based on their personal attributes.

Studies examining personal's attributes have used different dimensions. Philips and Bedeian (1994) have used attitudinal similarity, introversion, and extroversion, a focus of control and growth need strength. Heffernan and Sweeney (2009) in examining effective lecturers have considered dynamism, communication, rapport and applied knowledge as the dimensions for personal attributes. A study by Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon, and Sanford (2006) listed agency, communion and emotional vulnerability as the predictors for personal attributes. Agency portrays the masculinity scale that represents self-confident and competitiveness. Communion represents the femininity scale that includes characteristics such as kindness and personal warmth. Emotional vulnerability represents unsatisfactory internal consistency reliabilities (Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon and Sanford, 2006).

Data Analysis

A total of 130 respondents have been selected by using proportionate stratified random sampling. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents to evaluate their perception of items that measured each variable. The instruments involved in this study were adopted from various sources. In measuring the perception of politics (POPS), this study has adopted an instrument constructed by Ferris and Kachmar (1992). This measurement consists of three dimensions namely, 'get along to go ahead', pay and promotion and general politics. In addition, to measure personal attributes, this study has adopted a measurement constructed by Spence and Helmreich (in Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon and Sanford, 2006). Spence and Helmreich constructed three discriminant factors for personal attributes including male, female and male-female.

In data screening reliability, linearity, normality, and outliers were performed. In order to analyse the effect of personal attributes towards the perception of office politics (POPS), a regression analysis was performed

Reliability Test

A pilot test was performed in order to examine the reliability of items and consistency of instruments used in this study. Table 1 indicates the Cronbach Alpha value for every variable. According to Sekaran (2003), all variables are considered as reliable as the Cronbach Alpha values are exceeding .60.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

Variable	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
Perception of Politics	15	**.702**
Personal attribute	24	**.787**

Factor analysis

Factor analysis has been executed to determine a total of dimensions consisting of understudied variables of this study. A number of a factor will be determined by eigenvalue where a factor with eigenvalue that is equal or greater than 1 will be accepted.

In order to identify the convergent items for each dimension, the rotated component matrix has been performed.

This study has found that only one dimension of office politics namely 'get along to go ahead' that consists of items including '*Sometimes it is easier to remain quiet than to fight the system*'; '*Telling others what they want to hear is sometimes better than telling the truth*'; and '*It is safer to think what you are told that to make up your own mind*' was reliable for further analysis with Cronbach Alpha value .834.

For a personal attribute, the factor analysis result showed 2 discriminant factors. The first factor is named as 'Male attribute' and consists of items including '*I am very active*'; '*I am very competitive*'; and '*I feel very superior*' scored Cronbach Alpha value .768. The second factor for personal attribute is called as 'Female attribute' encompasses with items including '*I am very gentle*'; '*I am very helpful to others*'; '*I am very kind*'; '*I am very aware of feelings of others*'; '*I very understand of others*'; and '*I am very warm in relations with others*' has scored Cronbach Alpha value .919.

Regression analysis

Before pursuing a regression analysis, the researcher has ensured that no violations of regression assumptions have occurred. In testing residual violation, the researcher has performed a Casewise diagnostic and a Durbin-Watson test. For Casewise diagnostic, any standardized residual value that is greater than $\pm$ 3 will portray the violation of the residual. Another test to identify residual violation is a Durbin-Watson test. According to Nurosis (1995), if a Durbin-Watson value is in a range of 1.5 to 2.5, no residual violation exists.

Table 2: Coefficients Table For Perceptions of Office Politics

	Dependent variable **Usage (Standardized Beta)**
Female attribute	- .120*
Male attribute	.215*
F value = F(8,92)	**8.120***
R²	**0.467**
Durbin-Watson	**2.114**

* $p < 0.05$

a Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Politics

Discussion and Recommendations

In this study, office politics is represented by the 'get along to go ahead' dimension. The core of this dimension is that political behaviour is self-serving; therefore, an employee has the potential to threaten other's self-interest in order to achieve his/her personal interest (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). This dimension concentrates on centralization of power. Centralization, which refers to the distribution of power in organizations, also is expected to influence political perceptions. Specifically, a high degree of centralization would suggest that power and control are concentrated at the top of the organization, implying less direct control at lower levels and a greater potential for organizational political perceptions.

This study has proven that male attributes significantly influence the perception of office politics while employees with female attributes show the negative effects of office politics. Employees with male attributes show more masculine behaviour. They like to work in a challenging work environment where competition becomes the essence of a working milieu. While employees with the female attribute are more feminine and like to work with compromise and in a tolerant work environment. The results show that employees with male

attribute tempted to confront challenges, especially in a political game, in the organization so that he or she can demonstrate his or her talent to overcome the challenges faced. On the other hand, employees with female attributes will be de-motivated when they confront discrimination or power manipulation.

Employees with female or male attributes perceived things differently when it comes to office politics. According to Kachmar, Bachrach, Harris, and Zivnuska (2011), employees with male attributes will strive to achieve their personal objective if the office politics perception is high. They will show positive organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) when their behaviours are likely to be noticed by their superior and earn kudos (admiration). In contrast, employees with female attributes believe that leaders must behave consistently with ethical manners. Employees with the female attribute are likely to work in a harmonious office environment, having a committed leader and work with a leader who implements ethical management. Indartono and Chen (2011); Ipole, Agba & Okpa (2018) have found that employees with male attributes show higher commitment and trust than employees with female attributes, in the context of strong organizational politics and perceptions of equity.

Conclusion

Office politics may affect normal organizational process where it may damages productivity and performance at individual and organizational levels. Office politics is an evil that kills employees' morale. Office politics not only disturbs the harmonious organizational culture and working environment but also affects the mental well-being of the employees, hence, management is advised to look into this factor and resolve office politics as it affects the organizational ecosystem and sometimes good employees suffer and eventually get de-motivated towards hard work and organizational goals. Management can minimize the politics by imparting confidence in the workers by providing them with fair justice and ample and fair opportunities to grow with a decent amount of success rate for each individual employee.

It was observed in this present study that male attributed employees showed a significant effect on office politics while female attributed employees depicted negative effects. The results reveal that employees with a male attribute, who manifest masculine attitudes, tend to work in a challenging work environment where they can demonstrate their talent, innovation, and creativity. In contrast, employees with female attributes tend to work in a more harmonious working environment where the leaders are more compromising and ethics and teamwork becomes the principal of management. Employees with the female attributes can

easily feel frustrated especially when they are being discriminated, which can reduce their productivity.

Employees with the male attributes are suitable to become leaders while employees with the female attributes are fit to become good followers. Top management must treat employees with male attributes and employees with female attributes with justice so that they can work in a team. Teamwork must be encouraged in an office ecosystem. Hence, top management must control the existence of office politics activities; for instance power abuse, discrimination and office bully.

When employees work together to accomplish a goal, everybody benefits. Employers might "see" this in action in different ways. For example, team members in the workplace plan ahead and work cooperatively to assign tasks, assess progress, and deliver on time. They will be having professional discussions during which different approaches and opinions might be shared and assessed in a respectful manner. Even when certain employees end up with tasks that were not their first choices, jobs get done with limited complaints because it is in the spirit of teamwork and with the overall goal in mind. A leader or manager may often serve as the teamwork facilitator. In this case, team members participate respectfully in a discussion, carry out assigned tasks, and refer to the leader in the best interest of the goal. A consensus is wonderful, but not always possible, and an assigned leader will often support and facilitate the decision-making necessary for quality teamwork to exist.

This study has implication for research and practice in industrial relations. Leaders must observe their employees' personalities and attributes. This is because a different employee must be treated differently in order to fabricate their utmost creativity and talent.

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