The Effect of Personality on Office Politics Perception: An Experience from Malaysian Government Agencies

Daud, Z.ª, **Saiful Azizi, I.ᵇ**, **Sallehuddin, M.R.ᶜ**, [a,b,c]School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia

Organisational politics or office politics is really about manipulating power and authority to build relationship to get things done. In other words, it is about "stabbing" people to achieve objectives. In the decision making process, management retains the actual right for making decisions. To maintain its authority in the decision making process, the management will exercise its power. This will create politics in an organisation. Kacmar & Carlson (1997) exhibited that the perceptions individuals hold about the political nature of their work environment influence the way they do their job. They defined organisational politics as political activities that have social influences and it is designed to protect one's own self-interests. Therefore, managers' personalities may have a relationship with the occurrence of organisational politics. Personality is defined as the stable physical and mental characteristics responsible for a person's identity (Kinicki & Williams, 2006). The dominant managerial style may result from deep-rooted personality characteristics which predispose an individual to prefer one approach over another (Blake & Mouton, 1968). An individual's personality constructs their personal attribute. Hence, this study aims to examine the influence of individual's personalities on the execution of organisational politics.

Key words: *Employer-Employees Management, Industrial Relations, The Perception Of Office Politics, Personality.*

Introduction

Organisations with limited resources always experienced heightened levels of politicking among members because key actors within organisation are often competing to have a fair share of the limited resources for themselves and their unit (Ladebo, 2006). Valle & Perrewe (2000) defined individual political behaviour as the exercise of tactical influence by individuals which is strategically goal directed, rational, conscious and intended to promote self-interest, either at the expense of or in support of others' interest. Zanzi, Arthur & Shamir (1991) have studied the relationship between career concerns (personal success, organisational involvement, skill development and autonomy) and political tactics (hierarchical tactics and networking tactics) in different types of organisations (mechanic and organic). In the hierarchical tactic, leaders will demonstrate a dominating style of management and need for power is obvious. In this tactic, leaders will maintain their status. For the networking tactic, leaders appealed more toward common interest and relied (refer) more on the expert. Results of this study revealed that networking tactic was more related with career concern and 25% variance of the networking tactic was accounted for by people's career concerns.

A study by Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson & Anthony (1999) and Valle & Perrewe (2000) stated that perception of organisational politics is influenced by two environments: organisational and job environments. In an organisational environment, the organisational factor of centralisation was included. In a job environment influence, factors including feedback, advancement opportunity and interaction with others were examined. From correlation analysis, it was found that politics perception was positively related with centralisation. In addition, it was also positively related with job anxiety and intent to turnover among employees. These studies have shown that perception of organisational politics has a negative relationship with job satisfaction. Hence, it may affect employees' intention to quit.

Many studies regarding perception of organisation politics were conducted to foresee its influence on organisational performance for example job ambiguity and organisational citizenship behaviour. A study by Parker, Dipboye & Jackson (1995) suggested that the perception of politics may be a central dimension that employees use in making sense of organisational life. Organisation members may pay attention to organisational politics in order to understand and perhaps to exert greater influence over events in their work environment. Witt, Kacmar, Carlson & Zivnuska (2002) suggested that leaders must promote a positive work climate involving: tolerate inconveniences without complaint; openly cooperate with management and co-workers; converse organisational resources; take initiative to solve problem; and willingly attempt to help co-workers and the company when possible.

A study executed by Ladebo (2006) provides an empirical assessment of the effects of job ambiguity on perceptions of organisational politics and the moderating role of an employee's felt obligation on the relationships between organisational politics and job distress and

organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). From the correlation analysis this study has exhibited that organisational politics was significantly and positively correlated with job ambiguity and negatively correlated with felt obligation. This study concluded that the perception of politics in the workplace has negative implications for employees' felt obligation, job distress and willingness to engage in OCB. The influence of organisational politics on OCB was weaker for employees who had higher felt obligation scores than those who reported diminished desire to assist the organisation. Rozan (2009) pointed out in the study on the role of justice, trust and job ambiguity on organisational politics that individuals experiencing job ambiguity are more likely to experience organisational justice. And those who have personally experienced injustice are more likely to reduce their level of trust in the organisation. As a consequence, they are more likely to see informal and unsanctioned actions as political. The sample consisted of employees from a Malaysian finance company that was undergoing turnaround after experiencing substantial loss. Findings of the study exhibited that trust climate and organisational justice significantly and negatively affected perceptions of politics while job ambiguity positively and significantly influenced the perceptions of politics. This study also revealed that perception of politics significantly and positively predicted turnover intention. Rozan (2009) concluded that justice is an important element in developing trust and incorporate the issue of justice as an antecedent of perceptions of politics.

Similar with finding exhibited by Rozan (2009) regarding the influence of organisation politics and employees' intention to quit, Harris, Harris & Harvey (2008) discovered that perceptions of politics was positively and significantly affected with strain, role conflict and intent to turnover. The influence between perceptions of politics with perceived organisational support, job satisfaction and pay satisfaction were significant and negative. Harris, Harris & Harvey (2008) suggested that it is important for organisations to be aware that perceived organisational support depends not only on how caring and supportive the organisation is but also on the extent to which employees perceive others' behaviour as political. To foster a positive work environment, managers should endeavour to decrease organisational politics and increase organisational support.

Literature Review

Office politics

Kacmar & Carlson (1997) have made further validation on Perception of Political Scale (POPS) constructed by Ferris & Kacmar (1992). With three different studies and by using Structural Equation Modelling, Kacmar and Carlson have tested the dimensionality, reliability and validity of POPS. The study involved 2758 respondents in nine different samples. From the study results, Kacmar & Carlson (1997) have found that some of the POPS items were ineffective and needed to be removed and replaced. Hence, some of the original items have

been deleted and additional items were generated and tested in the attempt to refine and revise the POPS instrument.

Both studies (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992 and Kacmar & Carlson, 1997) have constructed three dimensions for perception of organisational politics. By using LISREL, Kacmar & Carlson (1997) have proved that in discriminant validity, three dimensions namely: general political behaviour; go along to get ahead; and pay and promotion have a reasonable overall fit to describe organisational politics.

The first dimension suggested by Ferris & Kachmar (1992) was Supervisor (Political) Behaviour. General political behaviour includes the behaviours of individuals who act in a self-serving manner to obtain valued outcome (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Political behaviour in an organisation will appear when there are no rules and regulations to govern employees' actions (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). When employees do not have any specific references as to acceptable behaviour, they will develop their own rules that are self-serving and giving them a better position to make their own decisions. When the information needed to make a decision is lacking or ambiguous, employees will rely on their own interpretation of the data (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Ladebo (2006) has studied the relationship between job ambiguity and organisational politics. From the correlation analysis results of the study, it is shown that organisational politics was significantly and positively correlated with job ambiguity. As mentioned earlier, politics behaviour among employees may evolve from the competition to get a limited resource (for example, not all employees are able to get promotion in a year). The actions engaged to secure the resource (for example, to secure the opportunity for promotion) may create a competition. Thus, employees will use politicking action to get or to secure their opportunity on limited resource (for example, to get promoted).

Get along to get ahead becomes the second dimension of POPS. The core of this dimension is that political behaviour is self-serving; therefore, employees have the potential to threaten other's self-interest (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Centralisation, which refers to the distribution of power in organisations, also is expected to influence politics perceptions. Specifically, a high degree of centralisation would suggest that power and control are concentrated at the top of the organisation, implying less direct control at lower levels and a greater potential for organisational politics perceptions (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Span of control is predicted to positively relate to perceptions of politics. As the span of control, or number of employees reporting to a supervisor, increases, the amount of attention a supervisor is able to devote to each individual employee decreases. This may create more ambiguity and uncertainty in the environment, thus promoting an environment in which perceptions of politics should be higher (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Kacmar & Carlson (1997) have exhibited that some individuals tend to avoid conflict. Hence, they will stay away from political actions and not resist with others' influence attempts. Kacmar and Carlson added employees who are avoiding political acts are not viewed as a threatening opponent to those who are acting politically. Nonthreatening

individual may be welcomed into the group and receive valued outcome simply for not inferring in individual's or group political agenda.

Pay and promotion policies are the final dimension of POPS. Ferris & Kachmar (1992) have found that opportunity for promotion was the sole predictor of the organisational policies and practice politics perceptions. In human resource management, employees who show high work commitment and efficiency will be rewarded while employees that show wrongful behaviour will be penalised. Hence, as individual oriented behaviour is often self-interested and political in nature; political activity will be performed in executing human resource practices (Kachmar & Carlson, 1997). Kachmar & Carlson (1997) added rewarding political behaviour also can influence those who have not interested in politicking in the past, to do so in the future.

Personality

Personality can be defined as the sum total of ways in which an individual reacts and interacts with others (Robbins, 2005). To Pervin & John (2001), personality represents those characteristics of the person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving.

Personality may represent a person's value judgments. A person may have a good personality or bad personality according to his or her beliefs, culture and surrounding environment. In handling grievances, supervisors may use different styles of resolution according to their perception and understanding on grievance issues referred to them. They too may resolve grievances in a bad or good way, due to their personality. According to Blake & Mouton (1968) personality is one of the factors that influence managerial styles. As stated by Robbins (2005), individual consideration on certain issue is based on their personality which is rooted by heredity (for example gender, muscle reflexes and energy level), environment (for example culture that form individual personality) and situation.

In general individual traits are manifest in behaviour (McCrae & John, 1992). Blake, Mouton, Barnes & Greiner (1964) showed that manager's traits play a vital role in the process of decision making. Individual's traits become fundamental in describing their personality (Pervin & John, 2001) which affects the consistency of patterns in the way individuals behave, feel and think (William, Jr. & Davis, 1996).

This research has utilised the Big-Five model. Robbins (2005) stated that many studies have supported the Big-Five model as five basic dimensions that encompass human personality. McCrae & John (1992) also agree that Five-factor model is the best dimension to describe personality. The Five-factor model refers to five basic factors in human personality namely extraversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness (Pervin & John, 2001). A study by John & Sanjay (1999) supported the reliability of Big-Five in measuring an

individual's personality. They indicated that these five dimensions have represented personality at the broadest level of abstraction. Each dimension summarised a large number of distinct and more specific defining personality characteristics.

The first dimension of personality is extraversion that implies an energetic approach toward the social and material world and includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness and positive emotionality (John & Sanjay, 1999). This dimension captures one's comfort level with relationships (Robbins, 2005). A low score in extraversion will portray an individual as quiet, task-oriented (Pervin & John, 2001) and feel too timid to engage in a problem-solving conversation with others (Antonioni, 1998). Second, agreeableness refers to the behavioural tendency to agree with others. Managers with a high degree of agreeableness tend to have traits such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust and modesty (John & Sanjay, 1999). In contrast, managers with a low degree in this dimension have a propensity to defer with others. Highly agreeable people are cooperative (Antonioni, 1998) and warm (Robbins, 2005). Agreeableness appears to involve the more humane aspects of humanity (McCrae & John, 1992) and this dimension assesses the quality of one's interpersonal orientation (Pervin & John, 2001). Conscientiousness is the third dimension of personality. Conscientiousness describes individuals who are tied with task-and-goal-directed behaviour. Conscientious managers tend to show behaviours such as: thinking before acting; delaying gratification; following norms and rules; and planning, organising and prioritizing tasks (John & Sanjay, 1999). A highly conscientious individual is responsible and persistent (Robbins, 2005) and prepared for mutual problem solving (Antonioni, 1998). Neuroticism becomes the fourth dimension of personality. Neuroticism is a dimension that contrasts with emotional stability. Neuroticism is related with negative emotionality, such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad and tense (John & Sanjay, 1999). Neuroticism taps a person's ability to withstand stress (Robbins, 2005). People with neuroticism personality were prone to psychological distress, unrealistic idea and maladaptive coping responses (Pervin & John, 2001). The last dimension of personality is openness to experience (intellect). Openness to experience describes the breadth, depth, originality and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life (John & Sanjay, 1999). This final dimension of personality addresses a person's range of interest and fascination with novelty (Robbins, 2005), appreciation of experience for its own sake and toleration for and exploration of the unfamiliar (Pervin & John, 2001). According to Antonioni (1998), low openness may be related to avoidance, rigidity and resistance to new ideas.

Data Analysis

A total of 130 respondents from 12 Malaysian government agencies located in the Northern Region have been selected by using proportionate stratified random sampling. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents to evaluate their perception of items that measured each variable. Instruments involved in this study were adopted from various sources. In measuring the POPS this study has adopted an instrument constructed by Ferris & Kachmar (1992). This

measurement consists of three dimensions namely: get along to go ahead, pay and promotion, and general politics.

There are three well-used measurements to measure personality. They are Goldberg's Trait Descriptive Adjectives (TDA), McCrea & Costa's Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness instrument (NEO-FFI) and John's Big Five Inventory (BFI). In comparing coefficient alpha reliabilities, John & Srivastava (1999) revealed that alpha values for TDA, BFI and NOE-FFI were 0.89, 0.83 and 0.79 respectively. Seeing that the Goldberg's TDA instrument scored the highest value of reliability, the researcher has adapted this instrument to measure the personality of supervisors in handling employee's grievances. Bamber & Castka (2006) have simplified the TDA instrument into 28 items which also covered 5 dimensions of personality that was established by Goldberg. As mentioned the short version of an instrument is preferable (Sekaran, 1992) and helps to increase response rate (Zikmund, 2003). Therefore this research adapted the instrument constructed by Bamber & Castka (2006). The Cronbach Alpha values for personality instrument developed by Bamber & Castka (2006) were extraversion (0.86), emotional stability (0.85), conscientiousness (0.77), imagination (0.61) and agreeableness (0.74). Due to the acceptable value of coefficient reliability on those dimensions, this study has used the instrument constructed by Bamber & Castka (2006) to measure personality.

In data screening reliability, linearity, normality and outliers were performed. In order to analyse the effect of personal attribute towards POPS regression analysis was performed

Reliability test

A pilot test was performed in order to examine the reliability of items used in this study. Table 1 indicates the Cronbach Alpha value for every variable. According to Sekaran (1992), all variables are considered as reliable as the Cronbach Alpha values are exceeding 0.60.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

Variable	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
Perception of Politics	15	**0.702**
Personality	28	**0.881**

Factor analysis

Factor analysis has been executed to determine a total of dimensions consisting of understudied variables of this study. A number of the factor will be determined by eigenvalue where factors with an eigenvalue that is equal or greater than 1.0 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 than to make up your own mind*' was reliable for further analysis with Cronbach Alpha value 0.834.

For personality, there were 3 factors that scored eigenvalues greater than 1. The cumulative percentage for eigenvalue is 62.209%. To examine items encompass in personality, the researcher performed rotated component matrix. By using 0.5 as factor loading, there were four items clustered in Factor 1, including: "*I feel concern for others*"; "*I am interested in others*"; and "*I rarely insult people*". Dimension for these items was called agreeableness. Factor 2 that encompassed 3 items was renamed as conscientiousness, including: "*I like order*"; and "*I get chores done right away*". For Factor 3, all items converged in this factor represent emotional stability, including: "*I get upset easily*"; and "*I have frequent mood swing*"; hence, the third factor is named as emotional stability.

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 Casewise diagnostic and Durbin-Watson test. For Casewise diagnostic, any standardised residual value that greater than ± 3 will portray the violation of residual. Another test to identify residual violation is the Durbin-Watson test. According to Nurosis (1995), if 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 (get along to go ahead)

	Dependent variable Usage (Standardised Beta)
Agreeableness	-0.280*
Conscientiousness	-0.515*
Emotional Stability	-0.629*
F value = F(6,92)	**5.120***
R^2	**0.421**
Durbin-Watson	**1.114**

* $p < 0.05$
Dependent Variable: Perceptions of Politics

Discussion

An individual's personality constructs their personal attributes. Personality is defined as the stable physical and mental characteristics responsible for a person's identity (Kinicki &

Williams, 2006). The dominant managerial style may result from deep-rooted personality characteristics which predispose an individual to prefer one approach over another. At the root of office politics, the issue of manipulation can happen in any relationship where one or more of the parties involved use indirect means to achieve their goals. Drory & Romm (1988) mentioned that organisational politics is more associated with informal behaviour rather than illegal behaviour. As Dhar (2009) defined politics in organisation involves the exercise of power to negotiate, therefore, communication skill becomes essential to influence others to achieve mutual objectives. In a study conducted by Heffernan & Sweeney (2009), communication became the mediating variable in the relationship between personal attributes and individual outcome (in this study teaching effectiveness represent the outcome). This study exhibited that personal attributes are important to enhance one's communication skill to achieve effectiveness in performing tasks. The regression result from Sharma & Mohapatra's (2009) study revealed that personal attributes influenced the level of managerial motivation.

Of the many terms that may be used to describe organisations and behaviours of the individuals within them, the term "political" may be one of the most descriptive (Parker, Dipboye & Jackson, 1995). The correlational analysis of political activity with the various personalities across gender performed by Kirchmeyer (1990) has revealed that the male managers who reported high self-monitoring abilities tended to report higher levels of political activity. Female managers who are highly motivated by power appear as political players. McClelland & Boyatzis (1982) have found that successful non-technical senior managers were more concerned about influencing others, less concerned about self and have a moderate to high degree of self-control.

Leaders who play political games are emotionally unstable. Emotional unstable people do not have the ability to withstand stress (Barrick & Mount, 1991) and become irrational (Robbins, 2005) when faced with power disadvantage. As depicted by Table 2, this study has revealed that emotional stability was a negatively significant predictor for perception of politics. To explain this, it has been noted that leaders who playing political games always compete to get a limited resource. This will create stress. Leaders will start creating their own group and start competing with other parties while securing their existing resource. Valle & Perrewe (2000) found in their study in two aerospace service firms, three manufacturing firms and one university in the south-eastern USA that employees' experienced outcomes were more negative when they perceived a highly political environment occurring in their organisation. In this situation, employees who have emotionality stability personality will always perform avoiding action via: over-conforming; passing the buck; playing dumb; depersonalising; avoiding blame via buffing; and playing safe when they perceive that office politics are at stake.

In office politics, grievances amongst employees become critical. It mainly crops up due to employees' frustration. Leaders have to become task-and-goal oriented and prepared for office political games (Saiful Azizi, I., Daud, Z., Ahmad Fauzi, A.Z., 2019). Therefore, they must

have conscientiousness personality. In this present study, conscientiousness personality exhibited a significant negative affect on perception of politics. In conscientiousness personality, leaders were seeking mutual resolution through planned and organised grievance resolution activities. Leaders will convey facts regarding company's practices and terms and condition of employment so that aggrieved employee can be informed about company's rules and regulation and their rights in the employment contract. Furthermore, heads of department conducted grievance discussion to listen to views and opinions from aggrieved employees regarding grievance issues. Alternatives for grievance resolution were generated by examining issues of grievance and gathering information. The examination of information was done in order to get satisfactorily grievance resolution results that complied with company's policy and collective agreement. Results from this study have supported a study conducted by Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams & Malcolm (2003) where these researchers have exhibited that conscientiousness personality was significantly and negatively predicting physical force strategy in handling conflict. In addition, a study carried out by Hochwarter, Witt & Kacmar (2000), the researchers exhibited that the negative correlation between conscientiousness and perceptions of politics suggests that individuals high in conscientiousness are likely to report low levels of politics. This is due as high-conscientiousness employees are more focused on task environment rather than social environment.

By employing Multiple Regression Analysis, this study has also found that perception of politics had less of an effect on interpersonal facilitation among workers high in agreeableness. Agreeableness personality refers to an individual's propensity to defer to others. Highly agreeable people are cooperative, warm and trusting. People who score low on agreeableness are antagonistic. This finding suggested that highly agreeable employees may be predisposed to behave cooperatively and helpfully and manifest interpersonal facilitation regardless of the levels of politics they see in the organisation.

Conclusion

This study revealed that employees will perceive low office politics influence if their leader is emotionally stable, with a high agreeableness and has a conscientiousness personality. Hence, this regression study has supported a correlational study performed by Witt, Kacmar, Carlson & Zivnuska, (2002) that involved 540 of the 946 private sector organisation employees has examined the influence of leaders' personalities on the perception of organisational politics. By using POPS constructed by Ferrish & Kachmar (1992), the correlation analysis of this study exhibited that conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience were significantly and negatively correlated with organisational politics.

Transparency in organisational policies, rules and regulation is vital to create satisfaction among employees in their job (Daud, Z., Saiful Azizi Ismail, Rashdan, M.S., & Fadzil, M.H., 2018). This notion eliminates any uncertainties in execution of tasks. Previous studies have shown that individual's personalities affect organisational politics. In building a relationship,

individual will seek for similarities based on leader's attributes. The influence amongst leaders and workers in an organisation to achieve a particular objective, creates utilisation of power, thus creates organisational politics (Daud, Z., Saiful Azizi, I., Mohd Rashdan, S., & Rusli, A., 2019). Individuals with high growth and strength may be willing to take on extra challenges only if they can receive desired outcomes resulted by the challenges. This means that individuals will use politics to influence or control others to achieve their objectives. The differences between personality and situational factors may affect managerial motivation. In this study of organisational politics, it is assumes that when a leader has experiences in politicking, they will use these experiences to gain power in order to influence other parties.

Organisational politics involve strategies that people play to gain advantage, personally or for a cause they support. The term often has a negative connotation, in that it refers to strategies people use to seek advantage at the expense of others or the greater good. In this context, it often adversely affects the working environment and relationships within organisation. The prevalence and intensity of office politics appears to vary with the characteristics of the organisation's structure and the particular situation. Office politics becomes more intensive with uncertainty, prior to decisions concerning resources distribution; and when the interdependence between departments and individuals on important resources is relatively high.

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