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Examining perceived organizational politics among Indian managers: Engagement as mediator and locus of control as moderator

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Examining perceived organizational politics among Indian managers

Politics
among Indian
managers

415

Engagement as mediator and locus of control as moderator

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to test the effects of perception of organizational politics (POPS) on work outcomes–work engagement, innovative work behaviour and turnover intention. Mediating role of work engagement and the moderating role of *locus* of control (LOC) on perceived organizational politics–outcome (innovative work behaviour and turnover intention) relationship was investigated.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were gathered from a sample of 302 full-time managerial employees in India. Results suggest that perceived organizational politics is significantly related to intention to quit and innovative work behaviour, and this relationship is partially mediated by work engagement. LOC moderates the organizational politics–work outcomes (work engagement and innovative work behaviour) relationship.

Findings – The current research demonstrates that availability of a work environment, where there are unfair decisions, nepotism and favoritism, is an impediment to engagement, innovative work behaviour and retention of managers. It behooves of top management therefore focusing on reducing POPS and subsequent deficits in motivation by providing clear feedback regarding which behaviours their organization desires.

Research limitations/implications – The study focused on POPS as reported by the employees and not on actual political behaviours. As the study did not cover all sectors, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.

Originality/value – The study extended the current research stream of perceived organizational politics research to one of the underrepresented developing Asian countries, India. The study also contributes in terms of its sample characteristics. Managerial employees working across different sectors, served as the setting of our empirical study.

Keywords India, Engagement, *Locus* of control, Perceived organizational politics

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Although contemporary organizations have become less formal and hierarchical, and more egalitarian (Friedman, 2006), organizational politics is a pervasive and inescapable part of an organization's social fabric (Pfeffer, 2013). Politics is an endemic phenomenon in organizations, with 88 per cent of managers reporting it exists in their organizations (Buchanan, 2008). Organizational politics is a social influence in which behaviour is designed to maximize short- or long-term self-interests, either consistent with or at the expense of others' interests (Miller *et al.*, 2008a). The manner in which employees perceive organizational politics, and the implications of the perceptions, has been



studied by examining perceptions of organizational politics (POPS), defined as individual, subjective evaluations regarding the extent to which a work environment is characterized by co-workers and supervisors who demonstrate self-serving behaviours (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). Based on these definitions, organizational politics is an antecedent of perceived politics. We focus on POPS and their relationships with work outcomes.

POPS is dysfunctional, yielding competitive disadvantages by diluting company-level performance and outcomes (Kacmar and Baron, 1999; Kapoutsis *et al.*, 2011). POPS redounds negatively with a variety of work outcomes such as depressed moods (Kane-Frieder *et al.*, 2014), negligent behaviours (Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2014), job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, job anxiety, strain, task performance and organizational citizenship (Chang *et al.*, 2009a; Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2014). Given deleterious effects of perceived politics on critical organizational outcomes, it received increasing scholarly attention in the past decade (Ferris *et al.*, 1994; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992) including two literature reviews (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Kacmar and Baron, 1999), two meta-analyses (Chang *et al.*, 2009a; Miller *et al.*, 2008a) and an edited book (Vigoda-Gadot and Drory, 2006). Research into organizational politics has expanded rapidly, but literature gaps remain. Much research focuses on outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment and turnover (Miller *et al.*, 2008b; Treadway *et al.*, 2004). Although these outcomes are pertinent to organizational effectiveness, there is a need to extend the range of work outcomes associated with POPS by examining its effects on other critical outcomes such as employee engagement and innovativeness, which offer companies competitive advantages (Bakker *et al.*, 2011; Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008; Parzefall and Hakanen, 2010). Since engaged and innovative employees enable organizations to respond swiftly to dynamic occurrences and address changing customer expectations (Choi, 2007; Marinova *et al.*, 2010), an understanding of factors that promote and impede such employees behaviours is exigent (Agarwal and Bhargava, 2014; Marinova *et al.*, 2015). Anchored in conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001), this study examines the effect of organizational politics on work engagement and innovative work behaviour (IWB), combined with intention to quit, to advance the range of variables associated with organizational politics.

Some studies examine direct effects of POPS on work outcomes, but few examine underlying mechanisms that explain the relationship. Consequently, understanding why organizational politics influences work outcomes is limited (Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2014). Drawing from the job-demand resource (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), we examine engagement as a means through which politics influences critical employee outcomes. Psychological constructs such as politics are subjective, influenced by individual beliefs, values and personalities concerning what construes politics (Ferris *et al.*, 1994). The cognitive interpretation (Lewin, 1936) suggests that politics is in the eye of the beholder, and individual differences accentuate or ameliorate the relationship between organizational politics and job performance (Witt *et al.*, 2002). However, a paucity of research investigates the indirect effects of personality on POPS and outcome relationships (Li *et al.*, 2014). This study examines moderation by *locus* of control (LOC). “Power is a social phenomenon (and) power, therefore, is constituted by culture” (Wildavsky, 1989). Classic cross-cultural studies of political behaviours (Almond and Verba, 1965) suggest individuals from one culture perceive politics and political behaviours differently from those in another. To generalize the theory, employee

reactions to perceived politics should be studied across cultures, but most knowledge of workplace politics comes from Western contexts (Karatepe, 2013; Poon, 2004, 2003), in which cultures are individualistic and have low power distance (Hofstede, 1980). Scarce empirical findings on organizational politics across cultures obscure understanding and restrict development of a comprehensive, theoretical framework of political processes at work. Addressing this limitation, we focus on POPS among Indian managerial employees. Figure 1 shows the theoretical model proposed and tested in this study.

The study has been organized as follows. The next section presents “Review of literature” and describes the theoretical background and rationale for the hypotheses. The “Method” and “Results” sections present details about the study sample, the measures used in the study, the data analyses performed and the main findings. The final section discusses the implications for both theory and practice, the limitations of the research and the directions for future research.

Review of the literature

Perceived organizational politics

Organizational politics is actions taken within an organization to acquire, develop and use power and other resources in a way that leads to preferred personal outcomes (Mintzberg, 1985). Highly political organizations reward employees who engage in strong influence tactics, take credit for others’ work, are members of powerful coalitions and have connections with high-ranking allies. Although disparate conceptualizations of organizational politics exist, a theme suggests concern with self-serving behaviours not sanctioned by an organization (Ferris *et al.*, 1994; Randall *et al.*, 1999; Valle and Perrew, 2000). POPS are employee perceptions regarding self-serving behaviours exhibited by influential organizational members regarding manipulation of organizational rules and policies to serve some individuals at the expense of others (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991). Ferris *et al.* (1989) developed a theoretical POPS model based on the premise that behaviours are driven by perceptions of reality (Lewin, 1936) rather than occurrences of objective political behaviours. The model suggests that organizational factors (e.g. centralization, delegation of authority and span of control), workplace environments and individual factors contribute to POPS, which in turn influence individual job attitudes and behaviours. Subsequent studies

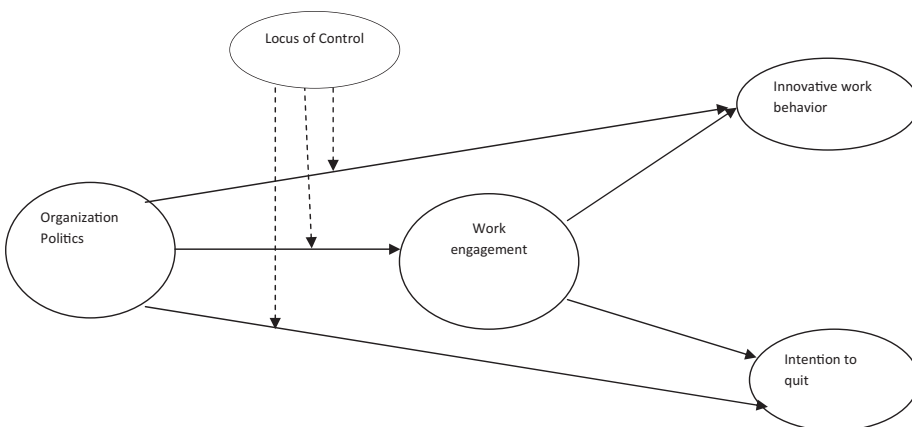


Figure 1.
The research model

tested various relationships proposed in the model. Extending the model, we examine the effects of POPS on work outcomes-engagement, IWBs and intention to quit. Although organizational politics can be healthy, most scholars and practitioners agree that a politically motivated work environment causes widespread damage (Kiewitz *et al.*, 2009). Both single studies and meta-analyses support the predominant view of politics perceptions as a strain-inducing stressor (LePine *et al.*, 2005) that is both divisive and pejorative (Chang *et al.*, 2009a). According with consensus, we assume this perspective of organizational politics.

The debilitating effects of POPS on work outcomes can be examined using COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), considered as one of the most cited theories in organizational behaviour literature (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). The theory proposes a model of human motivation that suggests acquisition and accumulation of resources initiates and maintains behaviours. The tenet of COR is that people are motivated to obtain, retain, foster and protect things they value, called “resources”, and that “are centrally valued in their own right, or act as means to obtain centrally valued ends” (Hobfoll, 2002). COR distinguishes four types of resources (Hobfoll and Freedy, 1993) people must acquire and maintain to adapt to an environment:

- (1) objects (e.g. shelter, food and tools);
- (2) personal characteristics (e.g. efficacy beliefs and skills);
- (3) conditions (e.g. tenure, social support and job control); and
- (4) energies (e.g. time, money and knowledge).

Stress occurs when resources are threatened or lost, or when individuals invest resources but do not reap anticipated benefits (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014).

One of the most important principles of the theory is primacy of resource loss, suggesting “resource loss is disproportionately more salient than resource gain” (Hobfoll, 2001). It is psychologically more harmful for individuals to lose resources than it is helpful for them to gain them. The saliency of resource loss has been applied primarily to assess stress and strain (Hobfoll, 2002). Many empirical studies suggest that when individuals lose resources at work, they are more likely to experience strain in the form of burnout (Shirom, 1989) and depression (Kessler *et al.*, 1988). Resource loss has a motivational element that suggests individuals engage in behaviours that avoid resource losses. Therefore, people must invest resources to deal with stressful conditions and prevent themselves from negative outcomes, but people prefer to avoid situations that result in resource losses. For example, employees experiencing abusive supervision (manifested through higher strain) are more likely to engage in feedback avoidance to avoid further resource losses from interacting with an abusive supervisor (Whitman *et al.*, 2014). Drawing from COR, the relationship between POPS and work outcomes is examined in detail in subsequent sections.

Perceived organizational politics and work outcomes

Perceived organizational politics and innovative work behaviours

Workplace innovation entails recognizing problems, generating new ideas and solutions, promoting and building coalitions of supporters and producing productive, applicable models (Scott and Bruce, 1994). IWB is a complex process that often entails difficulties, obstacles and frustrations because an innovative work approach requires investment in substantial cognitive and socio-political efforts. An innovative individual

faces not only a demanding situation in which substantial efforts are required to complete all stages of the innovation process but also resistance regarding those efforts and actions. People embrace stability and resist the insecurities and uncertainties that accompany changes associated with innovation (West and Farr, 1989).

A conducive work environment promotes IWBs (Amabile, 1988), but a workplace rife with politics is stressful to work in, with much of the employees' focus and time invested in coping and managing strain associated with politics, impeding work motivation to perform (Boswell *et al.*, 2004; Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2000; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007), draining existing resources and hindering IWBs. Concomitant with the motivational tenet of COR, to conserve resources and avoid further resource losses, employees perceiving their organizations as political might consider additional investments of cognitive and social efforts to innovate risky, and hence avoid IWBs. Thus:

H1a. POPS correlate negatively with IWBs.

Perceived organizational politics and intention to quit

Intention to quit discriminates between leavers and stayers (Sager, 1991). However, although intentions are indicators of subsequent behaviours, little is known about what determines intentions. Many researchers (Bluedorn, 1982; Kalliath and Beck, 2001; Saks, 2006) examine the effects of POPS on intention to quit, but results are inconsistent, showing a range of positive relationships (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997; Hochwarter *et al.*, 1999; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Valle and Perrewe, 2000), no effect (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997; Randall *et al.*, 1999) and negative relationships (Larwood *et al.*, 1998). Drawing from COR, we suggest a negative relationship between a perceived political environment and intention to quit. As politics adds stress to the environment, individuals might feel that leaving avoids resource losses and conserves resources (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997; Vigoda-Gadot and Drory, 2006). A perception of high politics, and accompanying disillusionment, results in higher turnover intentions (Ferris *et al.*, 1989). Thus:

H1b. POPS correlate negatively with intention to quit.

Perceived organizational politics and work engagement

Engagement is discretionary, achieved by investing physical, cognitive and emotional energy in work roles (Cameron *et al.*, 2003; Kahn, 1990). Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) offer the most common definition of work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption". Researchers use COR theory to assess engagement (Gorgievski and Hobfoll, 2008). Availability of a conducive work environment (which is trustworthy, secure, predictable and clear in terms of behavioural expectations) is a work-related resource that stimulates feelings of energy and enthusiasm (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) motivating employees to invest themselves fully in their work – physically, emotionally and psychologically (Hobfoll, 2001).

Performance standards and reward structures in organizations perceived to be political are uncertain and ambiguous (Rosen *et al.*, 2006). Acts of favouritism, unfair rewards and promotions build stress among employees, making them more susceptible to losing resources than gaining. In such work situations, employees are motivated to conserve resources by withdrawing from roles (Kahn, 1990). Studies (Crawford *et al.*,

2010; Karatepe, 2013) argue POPS correlate negatively with work engagement. This study also focuses on employee POPS as a work stressor which drains employee resources and hinders their abilities to attain personal and professional goals. Thus:

H1c. POPS correlate negatively with work engagement.

Mediation of work engagement

Recent research highlights the complex relationship between politics and outcomes (Miller *et al.*, 2008a), but understanding of psychological mechanisms related to political perceptions and employee outcomes is limited (Chang *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b). One psychological aspect that has gained increased attention is work engagement. Drawing from the JD-R, work engagement is a mediator (Agarwal *et al.*, 2012; Agarwal and Bhargava, 2014; Saks, 2006) regarding the relationship between work environment and employee outcomes. The JD-R model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) classifies a work environment in two general categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of a job requiring sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e. cognitive and emotional) effort, and associate with physiological and/or psychological costs. High job demands relate positively to emotional exhaustion (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Job resources refer to physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of a job that achieve work goals and reduce job demands, and associate with physiological and psychological costs or stimulate personal growth and development. An assumption of JD-R model is that job resources stimulate a motivational process resulting in high engagement, which in turn links with organizational outcomes through engagement. Similarly, the presence of high job demands triggers de-motivational process, linking with organizational outcomes through low engagement (Hobfoll, 2001).

Perceptions of political work environments can be conceived as a job demand that builds emotional strain among employees, which in turn triggers a demotivation process by inhibiting engagement (Christian *et al.*, 2011; Coetzee and Schreuder, 2010). Work engagement in turn affects IWBs and turnover intention negatively. The literature also suggests that POPS predicts engagement (Crawford *et al.*, 2010; Karatepe, 2013), and that work behaviours and intention to quit are outcomes of engagement (Agarwal *et al.*, 2012; Bakker *et al.*, 2007; Chughtai and Buckley, 2011). We propose that engagement mediates the perceived politics and outcomes relationship. Therefore:

H2. Work engagement partially mediates the relationship between POPS and (a) intention to quit and (b) IWBs.

Moderation of locus of control

The literature suggests that politics is not experienced universally as a negative or threatening aspect of work (Fedor *et al.*, 2008). The ambiguity inherent in political environments leaves the situation open to interpretation by individual employees. A strong sense of control links with a weakened association between POPS and work attitudes (Erez and Judge, 2001; Ferris *et al.*, 1989). Rotter's (1966) theory of LOC echoes the perceived control element that Ferris *et al.* (1989) suggest.

As a disposition, LOC represents the degree to which individuals attribute what happens to them to internal (e.g. skills, efforts and perseverance) or external factors (e.g. chance, other people and divine intervention). Individuals with internal LOC (i.e.

internals) are predisposed to perceiving their work environments positively and are adept at evaluating and responding to stressful work situations. They view stress in daily work situations as controllable and pursue work and personal goals even among adversities (Erez and Judge, 2001; Yukl and Latham, 1978). Those with an external LOC (i.e. externals) are predisposed to viewing their work environment negatively. They find stressful work situations threatening and blame environmental factors or others for their outcomes (Judge *et al.*, 2003). They adopt a passive role (Gianakos, 2002; Ng and Sorensen, 2008) and attribute outcomes to outside variables such as personal relationships between colleagues or business competitors. Internals are proactive, experience better interpersonal relationships with supervisors and co-workers and are more likely to engage in problem-focused, coping behaviours such as making and following plans and seeking instrumental social support to reduce or eliminate stressors.

According to COR theory, individual differences accentuate or ameliorate the political perception/job performance relationship (Witt *et al.*, 2002). Research suggests that LOC buffers the negative effects of unfavourable situational factors on performance (Cummings and Cooper, 1979; Spector, 1988). Due to personal resources and social capital, internals remain committed to a plan and pursue goals despite obstacles. We expect moderation by LOC on organizational politics/outcome relationships (i.e. work engagement, IWB and intention to quit). Therefore:

- H3a.* LOC moderates organizational politics and work engagement such that the negative relationship between organizational politics and work engagement is stronger for externals.
- H3b.* LOC moderates organizational politics and intention to quit such that the positive relationship between organizational politics and intention to quit is stronger for externals.
- H3c.* LOC moderates organizational politics and IWBs such that the negative relationship between organizational politics and IWBs is stronger for externals.

Methods

Sample and procedures

This study used a sample consisting of 490 full-time managerial employees enrolled in a part-time executive management program at a business school in Mumbai, India. Participants ranged from wide variety of sectors including retail and trade, petro-chemical industries, manufacturing, financial institutions, service and hospitality, information technology, telecommunications and consulting.

To minimize the effects of common method variance arising from self-reported and one-time data collection (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), the survey questionnaires were administered to the participants in three stages (with a gap of three months). Stage 1 of the study measured the POPS and demographic characteristics. After three months, the second stage included a questionnaire to measure work engagement and intention to quit. In the third stage, information on the LOC and IWB was collected from respondents. During the initial contact with the participants, the objectives, voluntary nature of the study and confidentiality of data were explained. The questionnaire was prepared in English and administered directly by the researcher.

A total of 302 managers comprised the final sample. The average age of the respondents was 36.6 years (SD = 7). In terms of demographics, 79.6 per cent of the sample was male and the average tenure of the participants were 9 years (SD = 1.2). In all, 25 per cent of the participants were from junior-level management, 64 per cent of the managers were from middle-level management and the others were senior management employees. In terms of the academic qualification, 54 per cent were graduates, 44 per cent post-graduates and rest had a PhD.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all measures used a response scale ranging from 1, which was “strongly disagree”, to 5, which was “strongly agree”.

Work engagement. Work engagement was measured with the nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). The UWES reflects three underlying dimensions, which are measured with three items each:

- (1) vigor (e.g. “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”);
- (2) dedication (e.g. “My job inspires me”); and
- (3) absorption (e.g. “I get carried away when I am working”).

The three dimensions of engagement were combined additively to create an overall scale of work engagement.

Perception of organizational politics scale. This variable was measured by a shorter version (12 items) of the POPS developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991).

Innovative work behaviour. The innovative behaviour of the respondents was rated using Janssen (2000). The respondents indicated how often they performed innovative activities, including “creating new ideas for difficult issues” (idea generation), “mobilizing support for innovative ideas” (idea promotion) and “transforming innovative ideas into useful applications” (idea realization). The three dimensions of IWB were combined additively to create an overall innovative behaviour scale.

Intention to quit (intention to quit). The present study used a five-item scale developed by Wayne *et al.* (1997).

Locus of control. The LOC scale developed by Rotter (1966) was used to measure each individual’s LOC orientation. Higher LOC is indicative of externals and internal LOC is indicative of internals.

Control variables. Research suggests that age, gender, education and tenure are related to POPS (Chang *et al.*, 2009b; Miller *et al.*, 2008b). As we were primarily interested in examining the relationship between POPS, work engagement, IWBs and intention to quit, in the data analysis, several demographic variables were controlled to rule out alternative explanations for the findings.

Preliminary analyses

Prior to testing the hypotheses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the dimensionality, convergent and discriminant validity of measures employed in this study. To evaluate the distinctiveness (discriminant validity) of the measures used in the study, Harmans’ one-factor test was conducted and the model fit of four-factor measurement model (POPS, work engagement, intention to quit and IWB) was compared to a one-factor model in which all the constructs loaded onto a single factor. Results of the CFA showed that the χ^2 value for the four-factor model was

($\chi^2 = 102.2$, $df = 41$, $p < 0.01$) lower than the single factor model ($\chi^2 = 447.6$, $df = 40$, $p < 0.01$). The fit indices of one-factor model also showed worse fit than the four-factor model. Thus, the four-factor model was retained for further analysis.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table I provides the descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables. In general, the zero-order correlation results were all in the expected direction, indicating preliminary support for the relationships depicted in Figure 1. As hypothesized, work engagement was positively related to IWB ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$) and negatively to intention to quit ($r = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$). Organizational politics was negatively related to work engagement ($r = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$) and IWB ($r = -0.37$, $p < 0.01$) and positively with intention to quit ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). The LOC was positively related to organizational politics ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) and intention to quit ($r = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$) and negatively related to work engagement ($r = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$) and IWB ($r = -0.13$, $p < 0.01$). As can be seen from the table, the constructs used in the study were reliable and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.92 exceeded the minimum acceptable level of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Using the procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Kelloway (1995) for testing mediation, a fully mediated model was tested against the partially mediated and non-mediated model (Figure 2 as a summary of the alternative models).

In Figure 2, Model 1, the mediating model, included paths from POPS to work engagement that had paths to the proposed outcomes (IWB and intention to quit). In Figure 2, Model 2 was the partially mediating model. To state, Model 2 included paths from both POPS and work engagement to proposed outcomes (IWB and intention to quit). Path from organizational politics to work engagement was also included. Therefore, according to this model, work outcomes were influenced both by politics and engagement. In Figure 2, Model 3 was the non-mediating model. The non-mediated model examined the direct relationship between politics and outcomes (IWB and intention to quit), but their direct relationship was not mediated by work engagement. Three criteria were used to compare the models: fit indices, path coefficients and the percentage of explained variance for each model separately. Fit indices of the models are described in Table II.

The Chi-square test (χ^2) is the first and most basic test for evaluating the model's fit. The smaller the value of the scale and the significance, the closer the model is to being a perfect fit. Model 2 showed a lower χ^2 value than Model 1 and Model 3 ($\chi^2 = 303.2$, $p < 0.01$ and $\chi^2 = 552.6$, $\chi^2 = 550$, $p < 0.01$), respectively.

The second indicator tests the ratio between χ^2 and the number of degrees of freedom in the model. If this ratio is 2.0 or less, the model is considered to be a good fit. The ratio of Model 2, partially mediating model was lower ($\chi^2 = 303.2$, $df = 246$; $\chi^2/df = 1.2$) than Model 1 ($\chi^2 = 552.6$, $df = 200$; $\chi^2/df = 2.7$) and Model 3 ($\chi^2 = 550$, $df = 201$; $\chi^2/df = 2.7$). Comparative fit index (CFI), non-normed fit index (NFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were additionally considered to assess the model fit. Hu and Bentler (1999) suggested that for CFI, NFI and GFI, values 0.95 and above indicate good fit. SRMR values below 0.08 suggest an acceptable model fit. For RMSEA, values less than 0.05 generally indicate good fit, while values between 0.05 and 0.08 suggest acceptable

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations and
correlations

| Variables | Mean | SD | Age | Gender | Education | Tenure | Job level | POPS | WE | IWB | ITQ | LOC |
|-----------|------|------|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Age | 36.6 | 7 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | 1.2 | 0.3 | -0.69* | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Education | 1.3 | 1.7 | 0.12** | -0.01 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Tenure | 9 | 1.31 | 0.68** | -0.09** | -0.17** | 1 | | | | | | |
| Job level | 1.9 | 1.2 | 0.31** | -0.11** | 0.08** | 0.19** | 1 | | | | | |
| POPS | 1.1 | 0.3 | 0.03 | -0.02 | -0.01 | 0.03 | 0.07** | 1 (0.87) | | | | |
| WE | 5.8 | 0.7 | 0.24** | -0.05** | -0.03 | 0.16** | 0.12** | -0.40** | 1 (0.88) | | | |
| IWB | 5.3 | 0.8 | 0.18** | -0.16** | 0.08 | 0.12** | 0.17** | -0.37** | 0.44** | 1 (0.92) | | |
| ITQ | 4.5 | 0.5 | 0.34** | 0.21* | 0.12* | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.23** | -0.13** | -0.23** | 1 (0.71) | |
| LOC | 1.2 | 0.2 | 0.01* | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.32 | 0.12 | 0.33** | -0.23** | -0.13** | 0.13** | 1 (0.82) |

Notes: $n = 393$; alpha reliabilities are given in the parentheses; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

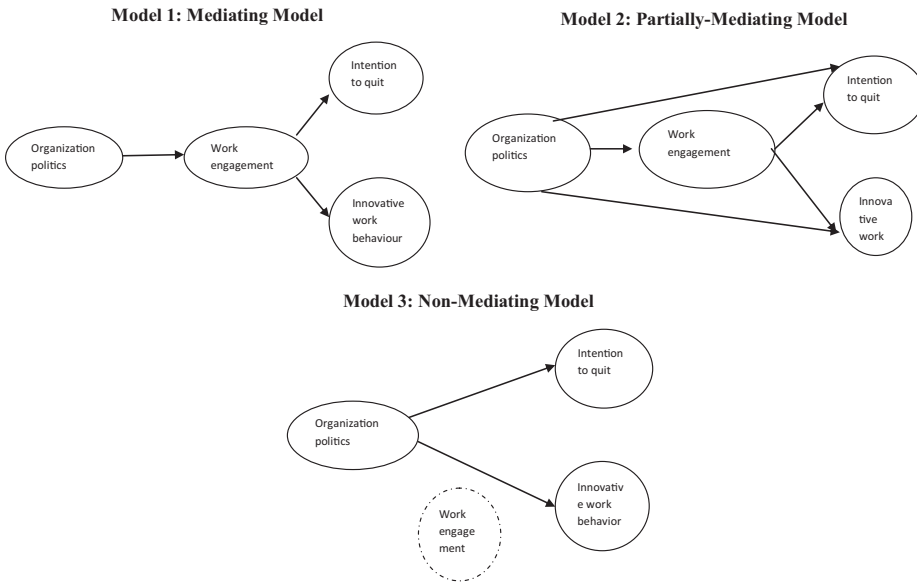


Figure 2. Test of alternative model

| Variables | χ^2 | df | χ^2/df | SRMR | GFI | NFI | CFI | RMSEA |
|---|----------|-----|-------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Model 1: Work engagement mediates the relationship between OP and work outcomes | 552.6 | 200 | 2.7 | 0.08 | 0.72 | 0.86 | 0.76 | 0.07 |
| Model 2: Work engagement Partially mediates the relationship between OP and work outcomes | 303.2 | 246 | 1.2 | 0.05 | 0.82 | 0.96 | 0.99 | 0.03 |
| Model 3: Work engagement does not mediate the relationship between OP and work outcomes | 550 | 201 | 2.7 | 0.06 | 0.82 | 0.91 | 0.83 | 0.03 |

Table II. Goodness-of-fit indexes

fit (Kline, 2005). In Model 1, the mediating showed good fit (GFI = 0.72, CFI = 0.76, NFI = 0.86 and SRMR = 0.08). The RMSEA value was 0.07. The mediating Model 2 showed better fit (GFI = 0.82, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.96 and SRMR = 0.05). The RMSEA value was 0.03. Model fit of Model 3, non-mediating model were (GFI = 0.82, CFI = 0.83, NFI = 0.91 RMSEA = 0.03 and SRMR = 0.06). According to this criterion, again Model 2 proved a better fit than Models 1 and 3 (Table II).

Examining the level of coefficients paths, Model 1 (Figure 2) showed that most of the existing paths in the model were significant and were in line with the hypotheses. Organizational politics was negatively related to work engagement ($\beta = -0.02, p < 0.05$) supporting *H1a*. Work engagement was positively related to IWB ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.05$) but not related to intention to quit ($\beta = -.006, p = n.s.$).

Compared with Model 1, Model 2 exhibited more significant paths. According to Model 2, organizational politics was negatively related work engagement ($\beta = -0.36, p < 0.01$) and IWB ($\beta = -0.16, p < 0.01$) and positively to intention to quit ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.01$), supporting *H1a*, *H1b* and *H1c*. Work engagement was positively related to IWB ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.01$), and negatively to intention to quit ($\beta = -0.12, p < 0.01$). Compared to Model 1, the number of significant paths and the β value and significance levels was higher.

According to Model 3, organizational politics was negatively related to IWB ($\beta = -0.16, p < 0.05$) but not related to intention to quit. In Model 3, Compared to Models 1 and 2, the β value and value significance was lower.

The percentage of explained variance is a third criterion for evaluating competing models. In Model 1, the direct model, 12 per cent of engagement and 21 per cent of intention to quit and 13 per cent of IWB was explained by independent variables. In Model 2, the indirect model, 45 per cent of engagement, 24 per cent of IWB and 5 per cent variance in intention to quit was explained by the independent variable. In Model 3, the non-mediating model, 3 per cent of variance of IWB and 1 per cent variance in intention to quit was explained by the organizational politics. Overall, Model 2, the partially mediating model scored better than Models 1 and 3 on all the three parameters – χ^2 test, the number of degrees of freedom it demonstrated, as well as on the coefficients and in terms of the variance explained. Hence, engagement has partially important mediating effect on the relationship between organizational politics and work outcomes (Figure 2), partially supporting *H2a* and *H2b*.

For testing of moderation effects of LOC on organizational politics–outcome relationship (*H3*), multiple hierarchical regression was performed as per the procedures recommended by (Baron and Kenny, 1986). In the first regression, independent variable (IV) (organizational politics) was regressed on the dependent variables (DV) (work engagement, intention to quit and IWB). In the second regression, both organizational politics and moderator variable (MV) (LOC) were independently regressed on the outcomes and, finally, in the third regression, independent variable (IV), MV and the interaction term (IV*MV) were entered in the regression. The significant values of standardized coefficients were observed for interaction effect only in case of IWB and PCB. The results suggest significant moderation effect of LOC in the relationship between organizational politics and engagement and IWB. The beta coefficient for the interaction term between organizational politics and LOC was significant for engagement ($\beta = -0.06, p < 0.001$) and IWB ($\beta = -0.01, p < 0.001$), but not for intention to quit. Thus, *H3a* and *H3c* were supported, but not *H3b* (Table III, Figures 3 and 4).

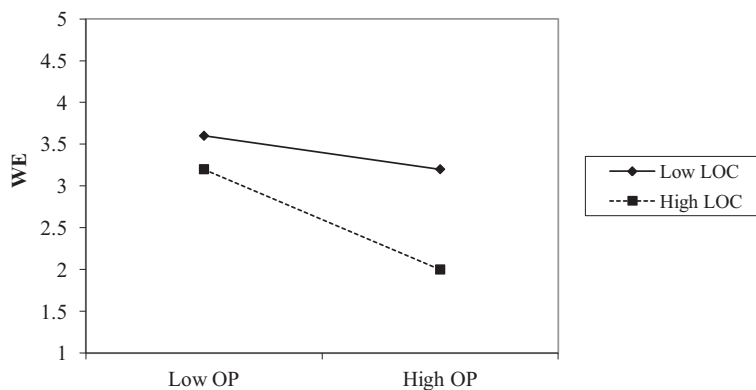
Discussion

Corroborating extant literature, we found that POPS correlate positively with intention to exit (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). To the best of author's knowledge, this is the first study to examine effects of POPS on IWBs. POPS as an antecedent of engagement advances the body of knowledge on work engagement. Although consensus exists regarding harmful consequences of workplace politics, recent studies report mixed evidence on the effects of perceived politics on a variety of job outcomes. For example, a meta-analysis (Chang *et al.*, 2009a) suggests such relationships vary across cultures and outcomes. Recent studies examining the positive effects of POPS on work outcomes are based on the

| Steps | Dependent variable | Work engagement <i>N</i> = 392 | Intention to quit <i>N</i> = 392 | IWB <i>N</i> = 392 |
|--------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Step 1 | Control variables | | | |
| | Age | 0.11** | 0.03* | 0.02 |
| | Tenure | 0.03 | 0.07 | -0.01* |
| | Education level | 0.09* | 0.05** | 0.01 |
| | Job level | 0.12* | 0.01 | 0.05* |
| | Gender | 0.10* | 0.10** | 0.02 |
| | R^2 | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.05 |
| | R^2 change | 0.07 | 0.21 | 0.08 |
| | <i>F</i> | 4.75** | 3.75** | 5.1** |
| Step 2 | Independent variable s | | | |
| | OP | 0.05 | 0.03* | 0.07* |
| | LOC | 0.01 | 0.09* | 0.11** |
| | R^2 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 0.04 |
| | R^2 change | 0.07 | 0.21 | 0.05 |
| | <i>F</i> | 4.32** | 4.50 | 5.6** |
| Step 3 | Interaction term | | | |
| | OP*LOC | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.06** |
| | R^2 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.06 |
| | R^2 change | 0.09 | 0.21 | 0.07 |
| | <i>F</i> | 3.4** | 4.2 | 6.1** |

Table III.
Moderating effect of
LOC on the
relationship between
OP and outcomes

Notes: Standardized regression coefficients are shown; the omitted benchmark industry variable was retail; R^2 values are unadjusted; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; all two-tailed tests

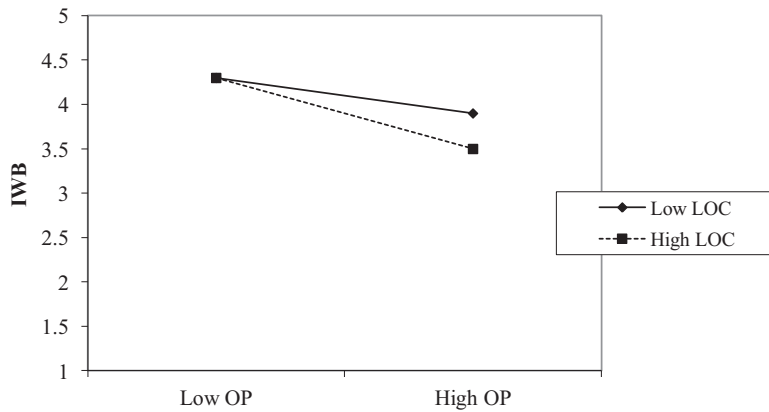


Note: High LOC is indicative of externals and low LOC is indicative of internals

Figure 3.
Moderating effect of
LOC on OP and work
engagement
relationship

argument that perceived politics results in employee immersion, augmenting involvement in their jobs (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Hsiung *et al.*, 2012). However, our results, garnered from a novel geographic setting, counter recent arguments that organizational politics has nourishing effects.

Figure 4.
Moderating effect of
LOC on OP and IWB
relationship



Note: High LOC is indicative of externals and low LOC is indicative of internals

By examining work engagement as a mediator of organizational politics and outcomes, this study addresses the gap of why POPS influence work-related outcomes. Findings suggest reactions to POPS on work outcomes are not direct, and some reactions precede others. An employee's POPS lead to reduced work engagement, which in turn affects innovativeness and turnover intentions. Thus, work engagement is of paramount importance, influencing organizational contexts and outcomes (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). Consistent with the interactionist approach, which posits that both dispositional and situational variables need to be considered when investigating employee discretionary attitudes and behaviours (Carlo *et al.*, 1992), we argue that the impact of POPS on work outcomes is moderated by LOC. Advancing the person-centred approach (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), our findings suggest that employees do not respond universally to politics negatively. Depending on their personality profiles, employees appraise (and respond to) politics disparately. Results suggest internals have an elevated degree of understanding and control over the work environment that leads them to appraise situations in a qualitatively different way than externals. For example, reaction to a negative work environment is less intense for an internal LOC person. Externals are affected more by organizational politics, and their reactions are more likely to result in reductions in extra-role behaviours. The results of this study advance understanding of engagement and IWBs by investigating how both organizational context (i.e. organizational politics) and the individual (i.e. personality characteristics) influence employee extra-role performance. Identification of these characteristics suggests not only selection strategies for hiring workers with predispositions to manifest high engagement and IWBs but also strategies for daily management that promotes these attitudes and behaviours.

Theoretical contributions

The JD-R model suggests job demands (e.g. time pressures, emotional workloads and problems with the physical work environment) lead to resource losses such as health problems and drainage of employees' energy resources in the form of, for example,

innovativeness and engagement. Drawing from the model (Bakker *et al.*, 2007), findings from this study corroborate the demotivation and stress-promoting potential of job-related demands such as perceived organizational politics. Given the considerable implications engagement and IWBs have for organizational performance, by exploring POPS as an antecedent of engagement and IWB, this study adds to the extant body of knowledge concerning these constructs. The study also provides insights into understanding COR theory by supporting the notion that traits act as resources, enabling people to manage, allocate and invest other resources more effectively. Gaining more insight into meta-resources in terms of personality, as COR describes (Perry *et al.*, 2008), advances engagement and COR literature by clarifying the ways individuals invest resources strategically to maximize future resource gains.

Much research on organization politics is conducted in Western contexts. This study contributes by exploring the effects of organization politics in a new context – India. Although not the objective, this study examines perceived politics among Indian managers, suggesting that about 85 per cent perceive high politics in their organizations. Finding deleterious effects of POPS on discretionary work outcomes is particularly significant, given India's unique sociocultural context. Indian society has been controlled for a long time. Emotional aloofness, combined with high control of subordinates characterized by the British style of Indian management, was inherited when the latter left India in 1947. Indians remain parochial in thinking, feeling and behaving. Underlying values of the Indian social system conform to authority figures to ensure societal harmony (Aryee *et al.*, 2002). In collectivist, high power distance cultures such as India, it is normative for people of a higher social status/hierarchy to deviate from norms of fair distributions or implement unfair procedures and policies, without provoking negative reactions from people of lower social status. People of lower social status are attuned to unfairness committed by authority figures because they perceive these actions as part of their role-defined privilege (Amba-Rao *et al.*, 2000). There is acceptance accompanied by both acquiescence and deference to those in superior positions and a desire to reach such positions and enjoy the benefits that come with them (Sinha, 1990; Sinha and Sinha, 1990).

Indians make a strong distinction between insiders and outsiders, preferring loyalty and dependability over efficiency and independence (Sinha, 1990). Indian organizations traditionally use patronage as a management model [1], which plays a role – explicit and implicit – in recruitment, selection and other HRM policies and practices (Budhwar, 2003). Exposure to multiple types of conflicts (e.g. national, regional, ethnic and social) makes Indians familiar with and accepting of power struggles and teaches individuals to cope with them daily. With greater familiarity with political processes inside and outside the workplace, and greater tolerances for informal, non-routine behaviours (Sinha, 1990), Indians view politics as a morally legitimate behaviour (D'cruz and Bharat, 2001). Research suggests that Indians consider organizational politics as given and may not be affected strongly by such organizational realities (Sinha and Sinha, 1990). However, the results of this study are contrary to the assumption. The variance explained by POPS on work outcomes – 35 per cent of engagement, 24 per cent IWB and 5 per cent intention to quit – suggests that like in the West, POPS has strong detrimental effects on Indians managers' engagement and innovativeness and affects their intentions to leave an organization. This is possibly because the sample of the study comprised young managers exposed heavily to Western values. Findings confirm that

two parts comprise contemporary India: one that is traditional and inward-looking, characterized by collectivism and high power distance, and the other unconventional and outward-looking, characterized by individualism and low power distance (Sinha, 1988). Employees in emerging India possess broader worldviews, values and norms, especially regarding work values. New genres of employees, though collectivist, possess strands of thoughts, feelings and actions that reflect underlying individualism, nourishing Western values of achievement, advancement fairness and equity.

Managerial implications

This study demonstrates that a work environment with unfair decisions, nepotism and favouritism impedes engagement, IWBs and manager retention. It is critical for top managers to reduce POPS and clarify feedback regarding desirable behaviours (Rosen *et al.*, 2006). As work engagement has consequences, human resources managers must design meaningful and challenging jobs and provide autonomy and feedback so employees can excel. This study suggests that personal dispositions influence how employees respond to POPS, which has important practical implications for recruiters, managers, trainers and executive coaches interested in diagnosing employees' developmental needs. Identification of these characteristics suggests selection strategies for hiring workers with predispositions to manifest high performance, even under unfavourable conditions. Training that focuses on personnel growth might be particularly helpful for externals because it unleashes their inner strengths and remedies the effects of a negative disposition and passive attitudes toward work. Although training cannot change the stable trait of LOC, it provides employees with skills that result in more effective, appropriate social interactions and coping behaviours.

Academic implications

Many people believe the world Machiavelli (1532/1998) described is over; we live in a postmodernist, egalitarian, merit-based paradise. Pfeffer (2013) argues that politics in organizations is here to stay, and those who avoid it do so at the cost of their careers. Bright, new incumbents who avoid, ignore or take organizational politics for granted have higher than expected, or desirable career, derailments. Studies, including this one, suggest politics continues to be an unfortunate reality of work. The "organization as political arena" metaphor (Mintzberg, 1983) and associated blurring of the assumption that reward decisions are commensurate with an individual's merit (Hall *et al.*, 2004), are valid. It is the onus of academicians to make future managers aware of this unfortunate but real and ubiquitous situation. To prevent students from falling prey to organizational politics, it is important for the education system to help students prepare and cultivate skills to navigate their careers by developing appropriate strategies, unleashing personal resources, developing large bases of social capital and building strong networks.

Limitations and future research

This study did not assess all economic sectors, and thus findings are provisional. The model should be tested in other organizations, industries and countries. Studies should use longitudinal data to enable better understanding of causal relationships among POPS, work engagement and work-related outcomes. This study examined only a restricted number of outcomes. Future studies should include a range of both

organizational and individual outcomes. This study combines empirical research from three areas: personality, politics and work outcomes. An opportunity exists to tie these areas using an overarching theoretical perspective. We recommend that the engagement and IWB area consider applicability of social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1997). SCT explains the way individuals strive to make sense of themselves and others. It assumes interactions among individuals, behaviours and environments, and thus captures the complexity of the human experience (Bandura, 1997). Applying the theory to engagement and IWBs would enable researchers to bring theoretical richness to interactions among political climate (i.e. an environmental variable), personality and performance perceptions (i.e. individual variables) and job dedication and interpersonal facilitation (i.e. behavioural variables). This study suggests the need to consider employee attitudes and behaviours in light of individual factors and the broader context of work environments. Results of this study point to the importance of creating organizational environments that promote employee extra-role performance and other desirable work behaviours.

Note

1. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

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