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Organizational Politics: Harmful or Helpful?

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Organizational Politics: Harmful or Helpful?

Submitted by

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Abstract

Politics play a role in almost every organization – churches, schools, sports teams, and even volunteer organizations. However, the place where politics can directly impact people on a daily basis is the workplace.

Literature on organizational politics has historically focused on a negative view of politics. More recently, however, researchers have discovered that workplace politics is not inherently negative and can even include positive traits. This shift primarily began with the work of Gotsis and Kortezi in 2010 and 2011. As researchers sought to expand the perspective, they argued that organizational politics has the potential to be positive, as well.

This study examines organizational politics, including the beliefs and experiences of employees from a large, multinational consumer package goods company based in New England. Study participants had varying views on organizational politics and workplace gossip, including whether the terms are negative, neutral, or positive.

The study also suggested practical implications regarding organizational politics, including ways organizations can mitigate the negative aspects and enhance the positive characteristics of internal politics.

Organizational Politics: Harmful or Helpful?

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Politics play a role in almost every organization. Most Americans clearly recognize politics within the government, yet ignore or deny the reality of politics elsewhere. Politics occurs within any type of organization – churches, schools, sports teams, and even volunteer organizations. However, the place where politics can directly impact people on a daily basis is the workplace.

Due to the huge impact politics can have on decisions of all kinds and sizes, as well as organizational health and employee engagement, this research focuses on the impact internal workplace politics has on individuals and organizations. How do employees view organizational politics, what impact does it have on corporate culture, and how can leaders encourage positive politics in organizations? This research aims to answer these questions.

Theory, Assumptions, and Review of Literature

Research on workplace politics has been shifting; what once was solely considered negative is now considered neutral or even positive. Gotsis and Kortezi (2011) found that organizational politics is not necessarily deleterious, despite historically considered as "self-serving, oriented to egotistically promote self-interest, and enhancing self-interest can be achieved at the expense of others' well-being, since it is detrimental to others' goals and pursuits" (p. 457).

Landells and Albrecht (2017) posit that individuals view organizational politics through one of four lenses: reactive, reluctant, strategic, or integrated, and their interpretation informs their view of workplace politics and the extent to which they personally engage in political behavior (Landells & Albrecht, 2017). Landells and Albrecht (2017) found that "building

relationships was variously perceived as 'sucking up' (reactive), 'pandering' (reluctant), 'building relationships so they can be called upon in future' (strategic), and 'working through other people' (integrated)" (p. 53). Organizational politics generally falls into one of five categories: relationships building, decision observation and interpretation, the manipulation of others, influencing of the decisions and resources, or personal reputation building (Landells & Albrecht, 2017).

Negative perceptions of politics (POPs) are concerning because they can result in counterproductive work behavior (CWB) such as poor employee attendance and sloppy performance, increased job stress, and decreased job satisfaction (Wiltshire, Bourdage, & Lee, 2014).

Scholars initially advocated working to eliminate organizational politics altogether, yet over time, recognized that workplace politics is unavoidable. Gotsis and Kortezi found (2010) that:

> Political considerations can constitute an inextricable part of organizational life insofar as organizations may be viewed as evolving power systems, in which nearly all organizational members often resort to influence tactics to effectively achieve their goals, or maintain, secure, and enhance their privileges, benefits, and respective advantages. (p. 497)

Maslyn, Farmer, and Bettenhausen (2017) studied POPs. Since workplace politics is unavoidable, they suggest, "Rather than focusing on rather futile attempts to eliminate political behavior, our results suggest managers ought to focus instead on shaping it toward goals that are beneficial for the organization as well as the individual" (p. 1507). This study, which consisted

of three surveys of more than 450 individuals, provided practical managerial applications based on the findings. The authors suggest that:

> Managers may wish to manage the distance or awareness of the political behavior in the organization to which they are privy, to help ensure that employees understand and perceive the benefits to the workgroup or organization. Likewise, they may wish to buffer employees when frequency or distance are likely to result in negative reactions. (2017, p. 1508)

In their 2010 literature review, Gotsis and Kortezi (2010) went on to posit that organizational politics, which has often been considered undesirable, can have positive outcomes from an ethical standpoint. Any negative view should not "diminish the opportunity of treating organizational politics as a participatory, constructive, interactive, and even, in some cases, an emancipatory process" (p. 505).

In 2011, Gotsis and Kortezi sought an "'enlightened' view of self-interest in fostering constructive politics within organizations" (p. 451). This progressive view incorporates bounded self-interest, which includes "pro-social dispositions, intrinsic motivation, acting in conformity to social norms, a focus on ethics and other-regarding/self-regarding preferences" (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2011, p. 458). Figure 1 shows how bounded self-interest impacts constructive politics (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2011).
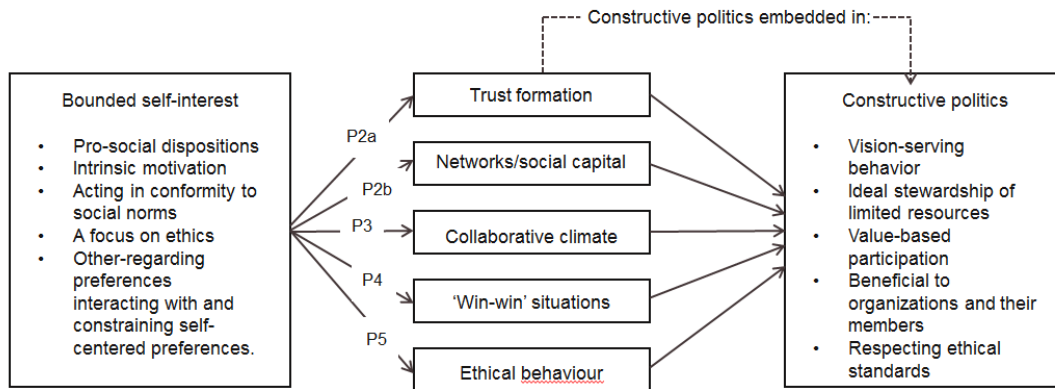
Notes: Integrating self-interest and constructive politics; capturing the impact of bounded self-interest on constructive politics

Figure 1: The impact of bounded self-interest on constructive politics (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2011, p. 459)

Gotsis and Kortezi's research (2011) went on to find company culture and collaboration are positively impacted through bounded self-interest. "Boundedly self-interested activities entail creative interpersonal relationships, a basis for constructive organizational politics. A collaborative organizational climate will mediate the positive effects of bounded self-interest on constructive politics" (p. 462).

Positive organizational politics includes empowering employees, inclusiveness and respect, connectedness and communication, excellence and goals, integrity and vision, and accountability and fairness (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010).

Ethics also plays a key role in constructive politics. Kacmar, Andrews, Harris, and Tepper (2013) posit:

Work environments with strong ethical leaders are more likely to possess norms and policies that value and reward ethical conduct. Organizations characterized by strong ethical leaders are more likely to hold followers accountable and use discipline and punishments accordingly. Conversely, leaders who fail to punish unethical behaviors and apply rewards inconsistently may promote an environment that is conducive to [negative] political behaviors. (p. 35)

Mitigating Negative POPs and Encouraging Positive Politics

Organizations and their leaders would benefit from learning more about workplace

politics, ways to mitigate negative POP, and strategies that encourage positive politics. Landells

and Albrecht's research (2015) states that people often have differing definitions of the term

organizational politics and the meaning of the term may evolve over time, even to the same

individual (p. 55).

Change management. Leaders can utilize change management to help mitigate negative

POPs, and a crucial way to do this is to ensure quality two-way communication between leaders

and the key audience (Griffith-Cooper & King, 2007). Griffith-Cooper and King (2007) state,

"Expertly designed change leadership is a collaboration between leaders and staff in which they

construct change together. If the design concept is shared between staff and leaders — rather

than directed from the top — then acceptance and ownership will be embraced with less

resistance" (p. 15). Josephine Jim (2016) stresses the connection between successful change

management and coaching, citing "the link creates positive energy in the change process,

especially in raising ability and confidence" (p. 75).

Justice and Rewards. Negative POP can be neutralized by procedural or distributive

justice, with distributive justice having the strongest influence (Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar,

2007). Harris et al. (2007) suggest that justice and rewards in political environments also impact

employee retention, stating that:

People are more satisfied and more willing to remain in an organization that has a

[negative] political environment, even when the process by which rewards are determined

are unfair, as long as they receive rewards. These same individuals are more likely to be

dissatisfied and to leave a political organization when they are not rewarded regardless of

how fairly the rewards are determined. (p. 142)

In addition, Rosen, Ferris, Brown, Chen, and Yan (2014) posit that "basic psychological

needs play an important role in mediating the effects of perceived organizational politics" (p.

1049).

Encouraging employee engagement. There are many benefits to engaged employees,

and positive POP is no exception. In a 2017 study of more than 250 employees of a high-tech

Israeli company, Liat Eldor found:

When engaged employees perceive their workplace to be political, they are more

proactive, creative, and adaptive, and more likely to share their knowledge with their

peers.… Whether politics is viewed as positive or negative depends on the employees'

point of view. For those who are engaged and more actively involved in their jobs,

politics can be regarded as a challenge and even an opportunity for obtaining more

resources to improve their performance. (p. 233)

Honesty-humility influences. Personality, particularly whether an employee has high or

low Honesty-Humility on the HEXACO personality inventory, greatly impacts perceptions of

organizational politics. Wiltshire et al. (2014) posit that:

Individuals who score low on Honesty-Humility have a tendency to manipulate or flatter

others for personal gain, to be interested in or motivated by high social status and wealth,

to feel entitled, as well as to feel tempted to bend the rules for personal profit. (as cited by

Lee and Ashton, 2004, p.237)

Similarly, job candidates with low Honesty-Humility are more likely to engage in

dishonest impression management, and hiring managers may inadvertently show a hiring

preference for such individuals (Wiltshire et al., 2014). Wiltshire et al. (2014) go on to

recommend that employers work to identify and hire candidates with high Honesty-Humility,

thus keeping the negative impression management of low Honesty-Humility personalities away

from the organization and positively influencing POP.

   Employee emotional well-being and anxiety. Attention to employee morale and open

communication are two of the best things executives can do to encourage positive POP in their

organizations. Franke and Foerstl (2018) posit that leaders should closely monitor employee

emotional well-being, as it largely influences political outcomes (p. 601). Conservation of

resources theory may also be able to predict POPs and employee anxiety. Cho and Yang (2018)

argue that "people strive to obtain, retain, and protect the quality and quantity of their resources

and to limit any state that threatens the security of those resources" (p. 62). Those resources

could include internal resources like self-esteem or external resources such as job security.

"(O)rganizational efforts to reduce employees' anxiety and depression resulting from POPs can

lessen these POPs' damaging effects on a given organization and its employees" (Cho & Yang,

2018, p. 67).

Workplace Gossip

   The study of organizational politics has branched to gossip. Gossip is inherently a part of

organizational politics, and it, too, is frequently viewed as negative, yet gossip researchers do not

share this view. Research by Brady, Brown, and Liang (2017) state that most people participate

in gossip to gather and validate information, not to negatively influence others. This six-phase

study found that gossip can have both positive and negative impacts, and the findings may be

universal since they were supported in studies in both individualistic cultures (North America)

and collectivistic cultures (China). Due to the results of this study, Brady, Brown, and Liang

(2017) suggest that workplace gossip (WG) "does not fit a deviance categorization, suggesting WG should be studied on its own, independent of deviance" (p. 17, p. 20).

Workplace gossip that may be viewed as negative is often the result of a lack of communication through formal channels, as employees seek honest information (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca, & Ellwardt, 2012, p. 54). Grosser et al. (2012) cite the following example of a manufacturing company:

> Senior management had been withholding information regarding an imminent downsizing and lying to employees about it when questioned by them. The trust employees had in information provided by senior management was destroyed when the employees eventually learned the truth regarding the downsizing. With all formal sources of information in the firm suspect, gossip and rumor was seen by employees as one of the most effective forms of communication available. (2012, p. 54).

Organizations can prevent negative workplace gossip by implementing effective, equal, and fair communication channels as well as by recognizing employee understanding of when they are being treated openly and with respect (Kong, 2018, p. 10).

Research Design and Methodology

In addition to the in-depth research and literature review above, this study consisted of interviews with employees of a large multi-national consumer package goods company based in New England. The company recently underwent an acquisition that increased the number of employees from approximately six thousand to nearly 35,000.

Research Sample

The targeted interviewees work in information technology (IT), a back-office function in which the company is tasked with reducing redundancies. The uncertainty at the time of the

interviews caused many employees to worry about job security, which is common when companies go through mergers and acquisitions.

Originally, 15 employees had committed to being interviewed, but time restraints due to heavy workloads resulted in seven completed interviews. All but one of the respondents were current employees. The one outstanding employee left the company shortly before the interviews were scheduled. Interviewees ranged from individual contributors to executives, four were female and three were male.

Instrumentation

This study used one-on-one interviews with current employees and one prior employee. Each respondent was asked 13 structured questions, along with follow-up questions based on responses. The interviews took place in interviewees' regular workspaces and meeting rooms, as well as via virtual meetings. Due to regular virtual meetings and collaboration, as well as participants' work in IT, the interviews were conducted in accordance with company norms. See Appendix A for a complete list of questions.

Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Ethical Considerations

Data was collected through interviews in which notes and transcripts were taken. The researcher collected the responses by question and themes that emerged, and then sorted the data accordingly. The researcher collected themes from the literature review, and developed questions based on those themes. This method allowed the data collected to align with the initial research design and methodology.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics of organizational politics and gossip, as well as the current corporate environment in which downsizing has occurred and is expected to continue,

interviewees were granted anonymity. This consideration resulted in honest and thorough answers from each interviewee.

Results

Organizational Politics Defined

Participants had varying views of whether organizational politics and workplace gossip are negative, neutral, or positive. Three participants thought both were either neutral or positive, three believed organizational politics was negative but gossip was neutral, and one found politics neutral but gossip negative. While the researcher expected differing views, this finding was contrary to the expectation that each respondent would have views aligned with their perceptions of the nature of organizational politics and workplace gossip.

Those who held organizational politics as negative considered it self-serving and attributed it to leaders or others with power. "Workplace politics is everywhere. My voice is never going to be heard. The people with power continue to control how they want things to be, and the people below see it and emulate it" (Participant 4, personal communication, December 20, 2018). Participant 5 held a similar view with similar terminology, stating, "Politics is people in power getting things done that maybe shouldn't be done" (personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Other respondents regarded organizational politics as an inevitable part of human nature: "It's individuals and groups jockeying for things that are in their best interest. It's based on greed and it's not going to go away" (Participant 3, personal communication, December 20, 2018). Another respondent stated that politics is embedded and engrained into organizations, and, therefore, organizations should work to eliminate personal agendas as opposed to workplace politics. "People must work toward the organization's overall needs, goals, and priorities.

Executives need to balance goals and agendas across the organization so that they benefit the

organization as a whole" (Participant 7, personal communication, December 21, 2018).

Workplace politics can also be defined in terms of organizational outcomes. Participant 6

stated:

Organizational politics consists of the collective negotiation to achieve an outcome.

Politics is necessary to release intellectual capital and achieve higher outcomes. It's

trying to persuade people to reach higher than themselves. You set ambitious goals and

ask people to strive to achieve more than they would have on their own. It's the 'whole

is greater than the sum of its parts' theory. (personal communication, December 21, 2018,

term as coined by the philosopher Aristotle, 384–322 BC)

Similar to the research of Griffith-Cooper and King (2007) and Lawler and Sillitoe

(2010), Participant 2 thought of organizational politics in terms of change management. "There

is a fine line between effective change management and organizational politics…. A change

often takes getting support from across the organization; change management shifts into politics

when you have to do side deals to get a good outcome" (personal communication, December 20,

2018).

Politics and Ethics

The ethics of workplace politics largely depends on motivation. One respondent stated

that when people follow established policies and procedures, they can avoid engaging in

unethical politics (Participant 5, personal communication, December 20, 2018). Another

interviewee reported that politics can be ethical when used to "right the ship" after others have

used it deceptively (Participant 7, personal communication, December 21, 2018). Similarly, a

third respondent stated that politics can benefit people and organizations alike by establishing

and enforcing rules, such as requiring business cases to support requests for limited resources

(Participant 3, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Transparency is another way internal politics and the similar concept of change

management can be used ethically, stating:

Change management is completely ethical and requires a lot of communication. Written

communications and town halls allow leaders to discuss the pros and cons of decisions in

an open environment. Ideas, vision, and where we're headed is what change

management strives to achieve. It is critical to the success of any initiative. (Participant

2, personal communication, December 20, 2018)

One respondent suggested that organizational politics is necessary. "If you eliminate

politics, the organization would become a mob. Politics is necessary to establish the story and

common goals. Without it, we don't have direction and commonality" (Participant 7, personal

communication, December 21, 2018).

Politics, Culture, and Trust

Respondents reported a close correlation between politics, company culture, and trust.

Leaders shape politics, which in turn shape the organization. Honesty, forthrightness, and

communication are key to building trust; inconsistency and ambiguity erode trust. The interviews

demonstrated a three-way relationship between positive politics, culture, and trust; transparency,

communication, and vision feed trust. Figure 2 below shows these relationships.
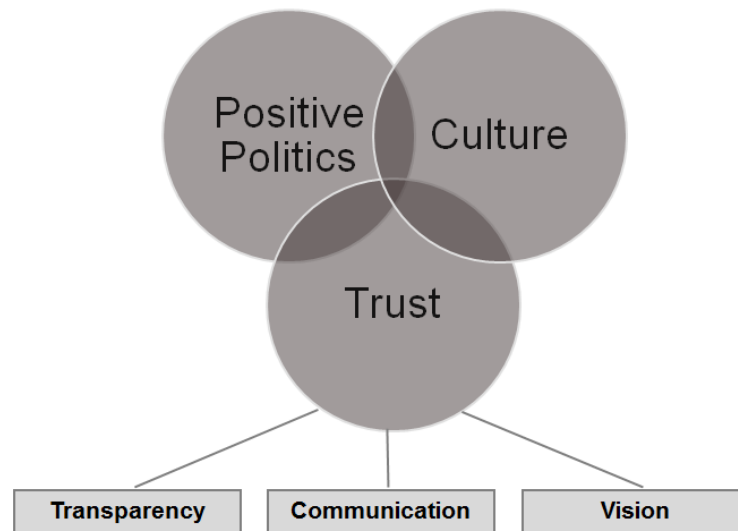
Figure 2: The relationship between politics, culture, and trust; transparency, communication, and vision feed trust.

One interviewee described a leader who struggles with the foundations for trust: transparency, communication, and vision. This respondent reported employees like this leader as an individual and think he is a good person but struggles with trust because the leader "is ambiguous in communications and vacillates so that people don't know what's coming. (This leader) alludes to the future but people are unsure because he is not articulating his vision" (Participant 6, personal communication, December 21, 2018). Another respondent suggested that some of this leader's struggle may be due to the communication skills and styles of technical people who work in IT. This interviewee stated that technical employees may have more trouble communicating in simple terms, which makes their points more difficult to understand (Participant 2, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

It is important to note that transparency can incorporate gamesmanship if an organization lacks transparency. "Transparency helps but the problem with transparency is that it's like

poker: People may be reluctant to share information if they fear it may be used against them"
(Participant 3, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

An employee who has left the company emphasized that governance and collaboration
build trust and improve culture. This individual suggested that showing the business case for
recommendations and aligning it with pre-determined priorities is key. She went on to say that
the company is:

> a case study on how organizational politics impacts culture. (The company) was much
> more friendly, collaborative, and transparent until it grew. New leaders came in thinking
> that they knew best. They stopped consulting longer-term employees so that those people
> no longer felt valued. People stopped listening to each other and the culture suffered.
> (Participant 7, personal communication, December 21, 2018)

This participant also reported that employees adopted military strategist Sun Tzu's (544-
496 BC) philosophy of "keep your friends close and your enemies closer" and even began
encroaching on others' personal space in meetings in attempts of dominance (personal
communication, December 21, 2018). A current employee echoed those sentiments, stating that
as the organization grows, politics and personalities can "get out of control, resulting in factions"
(Participant 3, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Another interviewee stated that politics and an individual's hierarchy in the organization
impacts culture. "People who are higher up on the chain of command have a better chance of
influencing politics, change, and culture, but those same people aren't interested in listening to
individual contributors" (Participant 4, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Conversely, one respondent said that politics is critical to the success of positive things
such as employee engagement, a sentiment that echoes the results of Eldor's 2017 study. Politics

allows leaders to communicate and show employees where an organization is headed. "IT town halls are great, but they can't be the only form of communication. You have to lobby employees around the future of IT…. These are things to get excited about" (Participant 2, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Politics and Rewards

Study participants had varied views about whether rewards such as promotions and recognition were based on merit or whether they were political in nature. "Political savvy equals favoritism," according to one participant. "It's all about who has the bigger voice" (Participant 4, personal communication, December 20, 2018). The employee who recently left the company stated that increased budgets and better performance reviews had a similar view: "It's not who deserves it most, but who speaks the loudest" (Participant 7, personal communication, December 21, 2018).

One reason these two respondents may view rewards as politically influenced is the experience multiple employees had during the most recent performance review cycle. A number of employees whose quality performance is regularly recognized as high performing were told by their managers that they were told by Human Resource representatives that they were not permitted to rate people higher than "good" unless they are already performing at a level much higher than their current roles require; in some cases, the managers communicated that they would have preferred to rate the employees as "excellent" (Participant 1, personal communication, December 19, 2018 & Participant 4, personal communication, December 20, 2018). If this is correct, it is a prime example of an area in which transparency and communication before the review meetings would have improved perceptions of politics.

Conversely, one other respondent said rewards were neutral while the other three viewed them as based on merit. "Promotions and rewards are a matter of steady performance over time. When people get the successes, when things shift in their favor, it's the result of performance" (Participant 6, personal communication, December 21, 2018).

Other Examples of Politics

Study participants reported several instances of workplace politics — some positive and some negative — not already addressed in this paper. Some of the following examples occurred at the New England-based consumer packaging company while others occurred in other organizations. Respondents personally witnessed the examples mentioned; they are not gossip that others shared with the interviewees.

Power and ego versus coaching and mentoring. One participant has witnessed ego causing people to adopt negative political behaviors. "Some people have agendas that are meant to show they are in charge. They want to demonstrate that they have the power to make decisions, and, therefore, they make decisions without input or consideration of others' knowledge." Such behavior is likely to be viewed poorly by others in the organization — male and female, individual contributors to leadership. This participant said that coaching and mentoring of employees, regardless of role or position, is critical to prevent the development of bad habits that may have negative effects on POPs (Participant 7, personal communication, December 21, 2018).

Products rushed to market. The desire to do well and pressure to perform can result in politics. In one instance, there was a major quality concern and a questionable consumer value proposition for a particular product that the company had publicly announced. Employees did not feel they could be transparent about their apprehensions to executive management due to the

political climate. The company sent the product to market and failed in a very expensive and

very public manner. Had employees felt comfortable voicing their concerns to executives, they

may have been able to avoid this costly mistake (Participant 2, personal communication,

December 20, 2018).

A similar example had better results. The respondent worked for a company that

developed weapons. A number of leaders wanted to ship the weapon despite the potential of a

life-threatening quality issue. Some leaders, however, refused to be deterred by political

pressure and escalated the issue to the president of the company. The president ultimately

decided the quality concern was significant enough that it had to be corrected before shipment

(Participant 2, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Poor personal behavior. One respondent provided an example of a person who was

initially hired for a high-level position but then moved into a less desirable role, stating it was

due to the individual's poor character. This person initially appeared to be an articulate, strategic

visionary, yet over time he consistently showed rude behavior and a lack of respect for others

(Participant 6, personal communication, December 21, 2018). This may be an example of the

Wiltshire et al. finding (2014) that employees with low Honesty-Humility on the HEXACO

personality inventory negatively impact perceptions of organizational politics yet frequently are

able to come across well in interviews.

Employee referrals. One respondent cited a company practice that rewards employees

for recommending friends to be hired for open jobs. This interviewee commented that this is a

form of politics, as employees know that referring a friend may impact their own reputations.

Therefore, employees are careful to only recommend people they feel will be a good fit at the

company (Participant 3, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Gossip

Study participants had differing views of workplace gossip, and the way they perceived gossip was largely determined by the character of the gossiper and the nature of the gossip itself.

Gossip was considered damaging if it was mean-spirited, destructive to others, or made incorrect assumptions (Participant 3, personal communication, December 20, 2018; Participant 5, personal communication, December 20, 2018; and Participant 7, personal communication, December 21, 2018).

Gossip may also indicate a lack of trust in the organization, such as when leaders give conflicting information about job stability. "There are more layoff rumors going around right now, and that creates uncertainty. But we're hearing mixed messages from month to month about how the organization is being restructured. Mixed messages lead to less trust and more doubt and can effect performance" (Participant 1, December 19, 2018).

Another participant had similar comments about gossip, saying it may indicate anxiety and fear:

> Gossip inherently carries a negative connotation… (but) sometimes you need to call out a problem to correct it. A lot of what may be perceived as gossip is apprehension; if you don't get an answer, you may need to sound the possibilities out. (IT) town halls foster a lot of talk because there is often conflicting or ambiguous messages. Gossip is a barometer of anxiety. (Participant 6, personal communication, December 21, 2018)

One interviewee (Participant 3, personal communication, December 20, 2018) gave the following reasons people gossip:

- Emotional venting when frustrated
- Ego, or "I know more or are more connected than you"

- Attempt to influence the political climate

- Trying to understand the climate when there is a lack of clear communication and transparency

Another respondent had a simple, innocuous reason people gossip: "You know why we do it? For conversation! (Participant 4, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Interpretation of Data, Limitations, Recommendations

This study sought to determine the impact workplace politics has on individuals and organizations, including trust and employee engagement.

Interpretation of the Data

Several themes emerged from the in-depth interviews, and the themes aligned with the studies referenced in the literature review. First, the term *organizational politics* has various meanings and is difficult to define. Participants defined the term largely based on whether they thought of politics as negative or neutral, and their beliefs were strongly held. Participants also tended to define political *behaviors* before developing more concise definitions.

Despite struggling to define organizational politics, respondents were able to easily identify the impacts of political behavior. Behaviors included attempting to secure support for goals, improve organizational outcomes, encourage ethical behavior, and implement change management successfully.

There was a key correlation between positive politics, culture, and trust, and trust was largely dependent on transparency, communication, and vision. Negative political behavior caused feelings of powerlessness and anxiety while positive politics built trust, increased collaboration, and enhanced employee engagement. One interesting finding of the importance of

positive POP was succinctly summarized by Participant 3: "People want to know the rules of the game" (personal communication, December 20, 2018).

There was a strong correlation among the findings from this study and research from the literature review, especially the work of Gotsis and Kortezi (2010 and 2001), Vigoda-Gadot and Talmund (2010), and Landells and Albrecht (2015).

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was the small sampling size. A total of 15 employees had originally committed to the interviews, but only seven completed them. The original 15 was representative of approximately 21% of the IT employees located at the corporate offices; the seven represent just 10% of that audience.

Due to the recent acquisition of another company and the requisite associated integration projects, workloads in the usually busy organization are significantly higher than normal. Of the seven people who completed interviews, six were current employees and one was an employee who left the company within the last three months. Interestingly enough, the interviewee who is no longer with the company left primarily due to political reasons.

Recommendations for Future Study and Recommendations regarding Organizational Politics

This study highlighted ways organizations could benefit from future studies on organizational politics, especially research that focuses on positive perceptions of politics, as well as ways organizations can counteract negative workplace politics and encourage positive organizational politics.

Recommendations for future study. Historically, the literature on organizational politics has focused on a negative view of POPs. However, more recently, researchers have discovered

that workplace politics is not inherently negative and can even include positive aspects. This

shift primarily began with the work of Gotsis and Kortezi in 2010 and 2011. In 2010, the

researchers sought to expand the perspective, and in 2011, they argued that self-interest, when

bounded or focused on the common good, could result in constructive organizational politics,

something that the results of this study mirrored. Therefore, future research should explore the

potential positive aspects of organizational politics.

Future studies should also include larger sampling sizes. While the original goal of 21%

participation for this study was reasonable, the final rate of 10% was disappointing. In addition,

the current body of work on constructive politics is relatively small and this investigation took

place early in the life of the field. Future studies should investigate constructive politics on

larger samplings and also expand from technology to other employees.

Practical implications regarding organizational politics.

Organizations would be wise to consider the impact of both negative and positive

perceptions of workplace politics, as they can most likely easily implement some of the

recommendations to improve culture.

First, this study has shown that communication and transparency are key to positive

POPs. Leaders should share information openly, transparently, and, most importantly,

consistently. Inconsistent messages decrease trust and employee engagement; conversely,

consistent messages, even when bearing less-than-desirable information, increases trust and

reduces negative POPs and gossip.

Employers should also strive to reduce negative perceptions of politics, as they enhance a

culture of distrust. Instead, use what may be termed *politics* to show employees that they are

valued and recognized for their contributions.

Finally, organizations should seek to coach and mentor employees of all levels. Coaching and mentoring not only cuts off negative behavioral habits early, but also creates a feeling that leaders are honest with and value employees of all levels.

By showing employees respect and communication, organizations have the opportunity to increase the positive perceptions of politics.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Background

Politics occurs within all types of organizations – churches, schools, and even volunteer organizations, but the place where politics can directly impact people on a daily basis is the workplace.

Organizational Politics

1. What does the term *organizational politics* mean to you?

2. Are *organizational politics* positive, negative, or neutral and why?

3. Is engaging in politics ethical or unethical? Why? How?

4. Should organizations work to eliminate politics? If so, how can they do that?

5. Can you shape politics so that it is beneficial to people and organizations alike? If so, how?

6. Please describe examples of organizational politics that you have experienced in your career.

7. Do you believe that things like promotions and bonuses are primarily based on merit or do positive awards go to the person who is most politically savvy?

8. How does organization politics impact culture here?

9. Please describe a situation in which you felt politics were at play. How did you handle it? What was the result or outcome?

10. How have you engaged in organizational politics to work toward a particular outcome? Was the outcome as you had hoped?

Workplace Gossip

1. Gossip and politics often go hand-in-hand. Do you believe that workplace gossip is inherently negative, positive, or neutral and why?

2. Please describe examples of workplace gossip and the impacts of the gossip.

3. Why do you think people engage in workplace gossip? What is their goal for gossiping?