

## Political Perceptions in Organizations and Theory of Planned Behavior: Evidence from Pakistan

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This research is an attempt to presents a model for how perception of politics (POP) creates a variance in intensions to perform a job. Current study tries to develop and test the model of psychological states developed based on theory of planned behavior. Theoretical framework explains how perceptions of politics develop job performance through different psychological states explained in theory. Model was empirically tested in government sector organizations of Pakistan, which seems to be more problematic regarding political perceptions. 525 respondents participated in this study. All respondents were employed in public and private sector organization and were studying part time business education in recognized business education institutes. SPSS v20 was used for data analysis and hypotheses testing. Mediation of psychological states was assessed through Preacher and Hayes process extension for SPSS. Results of study showed significant mediation of all psychological states i.e. felt obligation, psychological safety and organization-based self-esteem in relationship of perception of organizational politics with employee performance. Certain limitations, theoretical and managerial implications with contribution of study, future directions are also provided in order to get deep insight of unexplored areas that can be helpful for other researchers to investigate about.

**Keywords:** Perception of Organizational Politics, Theory of Planned Behavior

### INTRODUCTION

The main philosophy of the organizations is based on exchange. Organizations reward their employees in exchange of what they put in their organization (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997). This exchange creates competition to get maximum financial and non-financial reward among employees. In response to this competition is the development of self-serving behavior (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). Self-serving behavior (actions done for personal interests) brings some negative changes in organizational environment. When rewards are distributed on power and self-serving basis, organization becomes political. In such case, uncertainty raises and creates stress and frustration. Employees feel lack of confidence while putting efforts and most probably reduced positive outcomes. Perceptions of these political practices have detrimental effect on employee performance, creativity and organization citizenship behavior (Naseer, Raja, Syed, Donia, & Darr, 2016).

In fact, possible effect of perception of organizational politics on employees was originally introduced by Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, and Pondy (1989). These psychological factors have potential negative effects on individual behavior at workplace as well as in social life of employees and ultimately increases stress and anxiety (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Valle & Perrew, 2000). Theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) provides basis to understand how these psychological states develop and have effect on work outcomes. Thus, current study incorporated psychological safety, felt obligation and organization-based self-esteem as intervening psychological states considering job performance as intentional behavior. These psychological states are studied by other researchers as

well to find their effects on different job outcomes (e.g Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012).

Political behaviors prevail in all organizations in Pakistan, but intensity depends on work settings. Identifying these perceptions and intervening psychological processes developed based on these perceptions with their effect on job performance of employees is the specific objective of current study. Performance of employees in organization is based on perceptions of employees. Studying these perceptions with a view to increase overall job performance is also important (H. W. Abbas et al., 2015). This study incorporates multidimensional work performance that is based on different work behaviors of employees (i.e. task and contextual performance).

Relationship of perceptions of organizational politics with job performance is discussed by few studies in different dimensions like stress etc. (M. Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckennooghe, 2014; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Previous researches used direct approach to identify the effects of perception of politics on performance of employees (Bodla, Afza, & Danish, 2015; Bodla & Danish, 2008a, 2008b; Bodla & Danish, 2009). If these are stress (M. Abbas et al., 2014) or motivation (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) related behaviors, then these must be developed based on certain psychological processes. This study aimed to identify those psychological states developed in result of political perceptions in organizations.

However, most studies on political perceptions are carried out in American and European regions. Very few researches were found to address this issue in south Asian region particularly in Pakistan (M. Abbas et al., 2014; Danish, Ramzan, & Ahmad, 2013; Naseer et al., 2016). Current study discourses this gap by

providing an opportunity to test these concepts in non-western culture.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**

Theory of planned behavior is considered as “extension in theory of reasoned action”. Theory of reasoned action proposes that behaviors are based on motivational factors developed by intentions to behave. Theory of planned behavior proposes that behaviors are based on intentions that capture motivational factors and perceived behavioral control that captures ability to perform (Ajzen, 1991). Theory of planned behavior considers intentions as best predictor of behavior of employees. Theory explains three antecedents of intentions to behave i.e. attitude toward behavior, perceived social norms and perceived behavioral control. Attitude towards intentional behavior could be either positive or negative and develops on the basis of evaluation of consequences of target behavior (Krueger Jr, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000). Perceived social norms are perception of social pressure of “reference people” to perform or not to perform target behavior (Ajzen, 2002). Perceived behavior control is the perception about how easy or difficult is to conduct a behavior. Concept of behavioral control is quite similar to “self-efficacy” (Bandura & Wessels, 1997).

### **Perceptions organizational politics and job performance**

Environment of organizations in which employees has to work has an influence on their behavior (Hasan, Malik, & Khan, 2013). Q. Abbas and Awan (2017) investigated the relationship of perception of organizational politics with job performance of public sector employees and found that negative relationship exists. They argued that people with higher perceptions about politics shows negative outcomes.

Career improvement, acknowledgment and position, improved authority and status, achievement of personal objectives, getting work done, feeling attainment, boosted sense of power, and success are some positive results of politics. Loss of planned authority and status reliability, inner sense of guilty, feeling negative for others, internal feelings of guilt, and hindered job operations are harmful results of politics (Vigoda, 2002). The employees who have perception that their supervisor is highly concerned with the organizational politics are not likely to communicate with the supervisor (Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995).

The area of subjective perception about organizational politics dates back to Gandz and Murray (1980) initial investigation and then a conceptual model presented by Ferris et al. (1989) about a decade later. This model discussed antecedents and consequences of perception of organizational politics and has considerable influence on politics literature. Later on extension and replication in this model was made (Kacmar et al., 1999). Research has consistently shown that employee have less political perception if they interact with supervisor or if they perceive they have more promotion opportunities in organization. This is because perceptions of politics rely on perception of other’s behavior as being self-serving. Perception of organizational politics is also a reliable predictor of increased

job tension or decreased job satisfaction (Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002).

Many researchers found no relationship between perception of organizational politics and task or contextual performance (e.g Cropanzano et al., 1997; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999). Behind this insignificance in relationship, some intervening mechanisms are expected to be there. Some researcher suggests that relationship between organizational politics and performance is complex and guides about the existence of some intervening variables (Ferris et al., 2002; Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006). In the light of above arguments hypothesis developed is:

**H1:** POP negatively affect job performance.

### **POP and Psychological Safety**

Psychological safety is defined as “an individual psychological state where people feel confident that the surrounding interpersonal context is not threatening, and they will not be embarrassed or punished for expressing themselves” (Zhang, Fang, Wei, & Chen, 2010, p. 427). Kahn (1990) worked on antecedents of psychological safety and found that interpersonal relationship, group dynamics, leadership and organizational norms are main antecedents of psychological safety. Bateman and Crant (1993) argued that personality traits related to risk taking, learning and self-expression also effect psychological safety. Proactive personality, for instance, reflects a trait of engaging in proactive psychological safety by detecting problems and solution for themselves. Job design also has an impact on psychological state of employees, like independent work can have positive effect on psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999).

Many studies found positive impact of psychological safety on task performance (e.g Baer & Frese, 2003; Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011). Edmondson (1999) and West (1990) also discussed that psychological safety also helps to produce high performance by reducing risk taking of presenting new ideas. Psychological safety helps in focusing on tasks that ultimately results in enhancing performance (Faraj & Yan, 2009; Mayer & Gavin, 2005). Hence on the basis of above literature we can conclude that perception of politics is in antecedents and performance is consequences of psychological safety. Hypothesis developed for psychological safety is as under.

**H2:** Psychological safety mediates the relationship between POP and job performance.

### **POP and Felt Obligation**

Felt-obligation is defined as “a prescriptive belief regarding whether one should care about the organization’s well-being and should help the organization reach its goals” (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001, p. 42). Felt obligation is an important construct as it provides base for psychological contract of employees (Guest, 2004). Irving and Gellatly (2001) argued that employer’s promises of incentives create a socio-emotional factor that ultimately generates feeling to repay to the organization. (Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman, 2004)

Organizations deliberately focus on developing psychological contracts to manage performance and organization-employee

relations. It is positively related to organizational commitment and task performance (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman (2004) studied different traits of employees with felt-obligation and found that different traits create different impact on employees' feeling of obligation to repay to organization. A study conducted by Lounsbury, Gibson, and Hamrick (2004) showed that individuals with strong work drive put long hours to meet job demands and job performance. Influence of situational factor on employee felt obligation is reviewed by Eisenberger et al. (2001). Current study focuses on finding whether perception of organizational politics reduces felt obligation and ultimately reduced performance. Felt obligation is expected to be negatively affected by perception of politics and ultimately creating a pop-outcome linkage. This argument serves as basis for mediating role of felt-obligation in pop-performance relationship.

**H3:** Felt obligation mediates the relationship between POP and job performance.

### **POP and Organization based Self-Esteem**

Organization based self-esteem is recently defined by Chung and Yang (2017, p. 257) as "OBSE is specific to organizational context and allow individuals to perceive their own value". Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, and Dunham (1989) argues that people with high self-esteem maintain high self-perception which ultimately shows positive work behaviors while people with low self-esteem reflects low self-perception showing less positive work behaviors. Hence, self-esteem plays significant role in forecasting employees' attitude and work behaviors (Bowling, Eschleman, Wang, Kirkendall, & Alarcon, 2010). In organization-based self-esteem, employee believes his/her competence or worth in organization being a member of that.

Researches explored that when employees are excluded in decision making in organization, their concern for achievement of long term goals becomes low because their psychological and cognitive states becomes negatively affected (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003). Several studies also reported that any kind of stress affects individual's organization based self-esteem (e.g Jex & Elacqua, 1999). Based on above literature, we expect that perception of organizational politics has negative effect on organization-based self-esteem which ultimately affects job performance. OBSE is expected to have positive relationship with job performance.

**H7:** OBSE mediates the relationship between POP and job performance.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Current study uses quantitative research approach to assess the structural relationships among six constructs: perceptions of organizational politics, psychological safety, felt obligation, organization-based self-esteem, task performance and contextual performance. Partial least square path modeling in conjunction with Smart PLS was used to test nine hypotheses that hinges on theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). The study adopts cross-sectional research design in which data was collected once during whole study. In this study, survey research method was used to collect data through self-administered questionnaire. As a field study, variables were examined under

natural setting which consistent with correlation research (Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006). Hence, no attempt was made to control any variable of the study as common in experimental research design.

### **Population**

Population for this study is employees working in public or private sector organizations, studying business education in MBA Executive program in universities of Pakistan. Reason to choose such setting is since business students have better sense of realization of context. Respondents' understanding about research and the context is important for higher internal validity of responses. These employees are supposed to be aware of the policies, culture and environment of their respective organizations and free to respond away from their workplace without any hesitation to be observed by management. University students usually also maintain a long and close relationship with lecturers, supervisors, administrative and other supporting staff which makes research conducive in the domain (Hennig-Thurau, Langer, & Hansen, 2001; Leverin & Liljander, 2006). Under the umbrella of Higher Education Commission, National Business Education Accreditation Council gives accreditation to total of 36-degree awarding institutes in Pakistan at the time while data was collected. Of those 36 institutes, 14 institutes were short listed who are offering MBA Executive with condition of some experience as basic requirement of admission in degree. Researcher needed only those respondents who must have some workplace experience. Furthermore, a brief introduction of research is provided to respondents before collection of responses. Similar respondents were selected by many researchers in their research, e.g. Gandz and Murray (1980), Cropanzano et al. (1997), Randall et al. (1999), Poon (2003), Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun (2005), Bodla and Danish (2008a), Bodla and Danish (2008b), Bodla and Danish (2009), Danish et al. (2013), and Bodla et al. (2015). Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires. Unit of analysis is individual employees working in government and private sector organizations and are studying in part time or evening programs in universities of Pakistan.

Sample of the study is heterogeneous in the sense that it includes and represent view of employees form different organizations like manufacturing, financial services, health service, energy, education sector and telecommunication and information technology sectors.

Reason to choose these sectors is based on report of Transparency International published in 2013 included sectors with most corrupt practices in Pakistan. Corrupt sectors are supposed to have lower level of performance and higher political activities. These activities are basis for development of political perceptions. In this study, it is assumed that each individual working in any organizational environment has unique perception of organizational climate to be political or supportive.

### **Sampling and Procedure**

Deciding upon the size of sample and the technique of sampling is an important aspect. Relevant factors relate to size and design of sample is discussed as under:

### **Sample Size and Power analysis**

For number of respondents from population are selected by considering statistical chart of Green (1991), R. B. Kline and Santor (1999), and R. Kline (2005) proposed that 10:1 subjects to items ratio is more general. Keeping these guidelines in view, 10:1, 59 items multiplied by 10 gives 590. Hence, 590 respondents were selected for data collection.

Respondents were selected based on cluster sampling. Clusters were developed based on total recognized degree awarding institutes in each geographic unit. Calculations of cluster wise sample is summarizes below in table 1.

**Table 1: Geographic clusters of institutes for data collection**

S. No.	Province	No. of institutes	Sample calculation
1	Federal	4	(4/14)*590
2	Punjab	8	(8/14)*590
3	Sindh	1	(1/14)*590
4	KPK	1	(1/14)*590
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	

### Measurement of variables and instrumentation

In this study, a questionnaire was administered to the individual students in their capacity as employees of public and private organizations. The instrument comprises of two main parts. First part of questionnaire focuses on demographic information like age, gender and experience of respondent. Part B consists of 59 items that measure six variables of the study. Variables of study were measured on 5 point likert scale. Different constructs, their measure and authors has been provided in given table.

**Table 2: Measurement of variable**

Variable	Measure	No. of Items	Authors
Perceptions of politics	Perception of politics scale (POPS)	15	Kacmar & Carlson (1997)
Psychological States	Psychological safety	5	May et al. (2004)
	Felt obligation	7	Eisenberger et al. (2001)
	Organization based self-esteem	10	Pierce et al. (1989)
Job performance	Task performance	7	Williams & Anderson (1991)
	Contextual performance	15	Van Scotter & Motowidlo (1996)

### Analysis and Results

Table 3 reflects descriptives and alpha (internal consistency) results. Results specify that mean values range from 3.6 to 4.1 for all variables. Internal consistency values for all variables were acceptable for all variables so all the items adopted were included in analysis.

Table 3 presents pairwise correlation among variables. Correlation coefficient shows that correlation among perception of organizational politics and job performance is negative. All the relationships are significant with no multi-collinearity problem. Correlation results are consistent with previous studies like Danish et al. (2015).

**Table 3: Summary of reliability results of pilot test**

Variables	Mean	Std. deviation	Alpha
Perceptions of organizational politics	3.8475	0.66629	0.76
Psychological safety	4.0399	0.62638	0.77
Felt obligation	3.6525	0.69941	0.76
Organization based self-esteem	4.1300	0.68182	0.70
Job performance	4.0335	0.49652	0.92

**Table 4: Correlation coefficients**

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceptual of politics	1				
2. Psychological safety	-.365**	1			

3. Felt obligation	-.109*	.144**	1		
4. Self-esteem	-.299**	.437**	.183**	1	
5. Job performance	-.427**	.511**	.221**	.489**	1

### Regression Analysis

Results of mediation analysis are discussed in table 5 and 6. Table 5 shows that variance explained by independent variables is 40.4%. F-statistics is significant which means appropriate goodness of model. Table 6 represents direct of all the variables on dependent variable. All the coefficients are significant which explains that how much change is expected in dependent variable if independent is changed by one unit. This result coincides with the previous researches like H. W. Abbas et al. (2015); Ferris et al. (2002); Miller, Rutherford, and Kolodinsky (2008); Parker et al. (1995); Randall et al. (1999), which shows the negative outcomes of political perceptions.

**Table 5: Model summary**

R	R-square	MSE	F	p
0.6356	0.4040	0.1480	89.9857	0.000

**Table 6: Direct Effects**

Hypothesis/ Path	Coefficient	S.E	t	LLCI	HLCI
Constant	2.3644	0.1803	13.1122***	2.0102	2.7187
POP	-0.1691	0.0272	-6.2148***	-0.2226	-0.1157
Psychological safety	0.2331	0.0307	7.5837***	0.1727	0.2935
Felt obligation	0.0733	0.0243	3.0198**	0.0256	0.1210
OBSE	0.1994	0.0277	7.1895***	0.1449	0.2539

Dependent variable: job performance

**Table 7: Indirect Effects**

Hypothesis/ Path	Effect	S.E	LLCI	HLCI	Decision
POP ->PS-> JP	-0.0799	0.0179	-0.1198	-0.0500	Mediation
POP ->FO-> JP	-0.0084	0.0057	-0.0229	-0.0004	Mediation
POP ->OBSE-> JP	-0.0609	0.0141	-0.0930	-0.0371	Mediation

Table 7 shows the results of indirect effects. Here all the indirect effects are significant which shows mediation of psychological safety (PS), felt obligation (FO) and organization-based self-esteem (OBSE). Results are consistent with previous studies (e.g Liang et al., 2012).

### Conclusion and Discussion

This study was conducted to examine the psychological process in relationship of perception of organizational politics and job performance. Support for arguments was taken form theory of planned behavior and theoretical model was developed to understand how perception of organizational politics affects job performance through intervention of three psychological states. Results of the study validate psychological process discussed in theory of planned behavior. Results suggest that perception of politics create negative psychological states. These three states develop based on TPB and ultimately contribute in employees' intentions of behavior. If employees perceive that self-serving behaviors are carried out in organization, it will affect their psychological states which ultimately lower their job performance. This study is valuable because instead of focusing bivariate relationship, it gives managers an insight of how perceptions ultimately contribute to reduce performance. These factors are not visible so these need to be considered by organization. Motivation, developing trust and loyalty, communication and participation and fair processes in organization could be helpful in reducing negative results of perceptions. Future researches should be carried out to find some

solid solution through which negative psychological states can be controlled.

Study has some limitations too which can also be considered by future researches. Current study focuses on one side of perceptual climate. Other perceptions can also develop planned behaviors. Future research may consider those perceptions like perception of organizational support. This study focused on quantitative approach; qualitative approaches should also be considered in order to further explore this area.

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