

Perception of Politics and its Dual Outcomes: The Moderating Role of Psychological Hardiness

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Abstract

The current study examines the impact of perception of politics (POP) on employee creativity and workplace incivility simultaneously. With paired responses of 187 academic staff from various higher educational institutions of Pakistan, we tested for the main effects of perceived organizational politics on employee creativity and workplace incivility. In addition, the moderating effect of psychological hardiness was also tested. We conducted CFA and path analysis in GSEM (Generalized Structural Equation Model). The findings revealed that higher level of perception of politics lowers employee creativity and enhances workplace incivility. The moderating effect of psychological hardiness was also established.

Keywords: Perception of politics, Employee Creativity, Workplace Incivility, Psychological hardiness

Perception of Politics (POP) includes multiple acts of influence and exercise of power within an organizational setting (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010) which generally results in negative outcomes (Vigoda, 2000). However, some positive outcomes are also associated with it based on its instrumentality (Hochwarter et al, 2003). Employees might become involved in some legitimate, organizationally endorsed political activities that are beneficial to work groups and organizations (Fedor et al, 2008). The meta analyses on the outcomes of perception of politics (e.g. see Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008; Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009) gave indifferent results. This necessitates a study that tests positive and negative outcomes simultaneously. Thus, the main contribution of the present study is examining in a single model both positive and negative outcomes of perception of politics.

Another area of concern in extant literature is analyses of factors which might facilitate or curtail perception of politics and its resultant outcomes. Here we propose a unique variable called psychological hardiness as a moderating variable in this particular relationship. Employees with psychological hardiness face problems rather than avoiding them and thus they can resolve various issues emerging in political arenas of organizations (Kash et. al., 2000; Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, 1999). Inclusion of psychological hardiness as a moderating variable is the second contribution of the present study.

There have been various calls that perception of politics need to be studied in non-western/US cultural contexts (Vigoda & Talmud, 2010). Since perception of employees may vary in different contexts, results obtained from samples in a few select countries have an inherent limitation that cannot be generalized. Vigoda and Talmud (2010)

emphasized attributional aspects of perception of politics for variation in attitudes in a contextual frame of mind. Ferris and Hochwarter (2011) also emphasized context specific studies to better understand the phenomenon. Addressing these calls, the third contribution of the present study is examining the perception of politics in a unique context of Pakistan where studies on this issue are rarely conducted.

Attribution theory lends support to the idea that people attempt to make sense of social situations by attributing perceived attitudes and behaviors to others. Wiener (1986) posits that individuals perceive observed behavior to be intentional and then attribute internal or external causes to that behavior. In the case of one's own success, one attributes success to internal factors; in the case of failure to external factors. In contrast, when others' fail, internal attribution is often used and in the case of success, external attribution comes into play.

Perception of politics leads to dual outcomes, as it has the potential to generate positive and negative outcomes simultaneously e.g., employee creativity, workplace incivility. Employee creativity is highly desirable but without access to scarce resources it is nearly impossible to exercise, thus, only POP acts as facilitating mechanism. On the other hand, workplace incivility is highly objectionable behavior but prevails in organizations because of perceived negativity associated with POP. Simultaneously, psychological hardiness is emphasized as a coping mechanism in highly political organizations. Thus, the present study connects POP with dual outcomes and extends its relationship with psychological hardiness for the employees working in both public and private sector universities of Pakistan.

The originality of the study is based on calls of recent studies which emphasized studying these phenomena in unique sectors like academia. Furthermore, this study is assessing faculty members' attitudes and behavior simultaneously to give an idea of their ultimate reactions associated with POP. Thus, the contribution of the present study is three-fold. It first examines positive and negative outcomes in a single model. Secondly, we study a unique interacting variable which is psychological hardiness. Thirdly, we use the unique context of Pakistan, which will enhance the generalizability of already tested models in western/US context.

Literature Review

Relationship between Perception of Politics and Employee Creativity

Mintzberg, (1983) suggests that politics in organizations is identical to manipulation and intimidating influential tactics. These may occur at the individual, group, or organizational level simultaneously (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer & Bettenhausen, 2008; Hochwarter, Ferris, Laird, Treadway & Gallagher, 2010). Various factors and outcomes are associated within an organization having an environment characterized

by politics. Though it is associated with negative outcomes, recent studies also focused on its impact on some unique variables like innovative performance (Abbas & Raja 2014). Employee creativity is defined as a phenomenon characterized by divergent thinking and problem solving (Runco, 2014) originality and appropriateness (Acar & Runco, 2015), and studies also link it with organizational environment (Abdulla & Cramond, 2017).

Though we find creativity is a variable of interest in various domains like management sciences (Jam et. al., 2016), engineering (Cropley, 2015) and mathematics (Sriraman & Lee, 2011), still its link with antecedents like perception of politics is not well established. Individuals may demonstrate higher levels of creativity in politically charged environments (Jam et. al., 2016; Abbas & Raja, 2014). A highly political environment that facilitates or even permits manipulative behavior, would result in a decrease in employee creativity (Naseer et al, 2016). Generally, person-context exchanges contribute to individual creativity and innovation (Zubair & Kamal, 2016; Ishaque et. al. 2014). Employees' perception of politics encourages them to behave according to their own standpoints and benefits (Baer & Frese, 2003).

Perceived organization politics (POP) necessitates an individual's subjective understanding about the extent to which the organizational environment is political (Gill, Lapalme & Seguin, 2014). It's a major predictor of employee creativity in the form of a facilitating environment. Employee creativity demands organizations to adapt to changing environments and respond to growth, as access and availability of resources for creativity can be ensured only through positive perception of politics. Kaya, Aydin and Ayhan (2016) also supported our notion that individuals try to cultivate their individual benefits with politics. Based on these findings, we find a diverse impact of politics on creativity hence we present the first hypothesis of the study which states that:

H1: Perception of Politics is positively associated with employee creativity.

Relationship between Perception of Politics and Workplace Incivility

Empirical evidence also suggests that perceptions of politics is a predictor of negative attitudes (Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2016) which may include workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion (Naseer, Raja & Donia, 2016). When employees perceive high levels of organizational politics, they hold the organization responsible for certain outcomes (Kiewitz, Restubog, Zagenczyk & Hochwarter, 2009). Kapoutsis, Papalexandris, Nikolopoulos, Hochwarter and Ferris (2011) explained that increased workplace politics can foster perceptions of undermining and prompt several harmful outcomes.

Regarding negative outcomes, in a recent study, Arogundade, Arogundade and Gbajijo (2016) related higher level of perception of

organizational politics with higher level of workplace incivility. Incivility creates a sense of uneasiness for spectators (Goetz, Keltner & Thomas, 2001). This behavior is disrespectful (e.g., verbal and non-verbal) towards other members with an intent to harm others' dignity and self-esteem (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson & Porath, 2005). It silently damages not only people but also organizations (Sguera et al, 2016) thus acknowledged as low-intensity behavior. However, low intensity does not mean low impact (Hershcovis, 2011). Generally, organizations with chaotic work environment compel employees to perceive it as mistreatment when their higher authorities use them as a tool to get work done (Roscigno, Lopez & Hodson, 2009). Workplace incivility is on the rise and yields negative consequences as employees perceive that instead of helping and facilitating them officials are there to cheat them, which ultimately makes them reactive towards the organization.

Earlier studies like Rosen et al (2016) and Ogunbamila (2013) also supported the view that politics can propagate incivility. Pearson and Porath (2005) promoted the idea that an ambiguous environment fostered uncivil behavior among colleagues and relationships diminished accordingly. These findings lead us to second hypotheses of the study which states that:

H2: Perception of politics is positively associated with workplace incivility.

Moderating Role of Psychological Hardiness

In this particular study, the moderating role of psychological hardiness is being emphasized which is a personality construct, involving a sense of commitment, feeling of being in command and feeling defiant (Kobasa, 1979) which helps in facing stress related events (Maddi, 1999). Earlier studies have related other dimensions of personality in specific perception of politics and its outcomes (Rosen et. al., 2006) but the role of psychological hardiness has received limited attention. We assume that individual's personal hardiness may appear as a good buffering agent against the potentially negative aftermaths of POP. Chang, Rosen and Levy (2009) also emphasized studying the moderating role of psychological hardiness for the relationship of POP and its negative outcomes.

We assume that the powerful effect of psychological hardiness would work as a buffer and a recompense mechanism for perceptions of politics in organizations. Psychological hardiness has been characterized by perceived control, commitment and challenges, where control indicates control over various aspects, commitment reflects one's devotion towards personal accomplishments, and challenge is the tendency to accept problems and view it as an opportunity (Kobasa, 1982; Maddi, 2007). Hardy employees face problems rather than avoid

them and interact with others for assistance and encouragement rather than striking out, and transform potential disasters into growth opportunities (Maddi, 2002).

Furthermore, hardiness acts as a shielding mechanism for perceived negativity associated with the work environment of an organization. The combination of commitment, control and challenge enables employees to deal with the perceptions effectively, interpret situations nicely, and diminish undue arousal and consequent negative outcomes. Thus, there is ultimately an increase in personal accomplishment and less chances of demoralization and involvement in negative attitudes and behaviors (Kash et. al., 2000; Kobasa, 1982). Thus, on the basis of theoretical support we propose the following relationship:

H3: Psychological hardiness moderates the relationship between perception of politics and workplace incivility in such a way that that higher level of psychological hardiness will weaken the relationship.

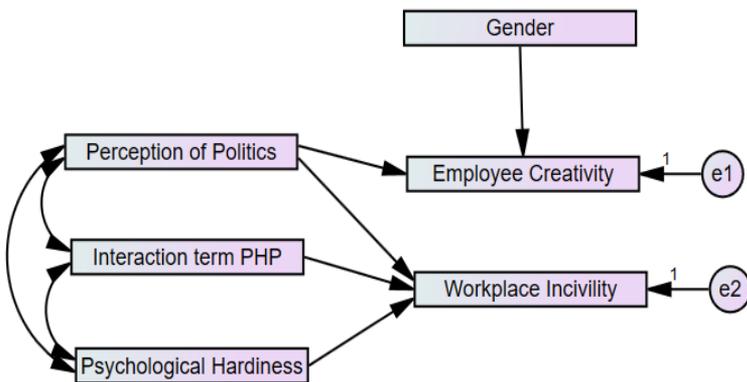


Figure 1. Proposed Model of the study

Research Methodology

Data Collection procedure

Data were collected in two phases from academics of public and private sector universities, through on-line survey as well as self-administered questionnaires. A few friends working as faculty members in different universities also cooperated for data. The first questionnaire assessed data about employees' demographics, independent variable perception of politics and moderating variable psychological hardiness. Then, we complemented this first term with a second wave of data collection after two months. A dyadic response was desirable for a response to be considered valid. Heads of departments and deans of different departments were requested to evaluate their subordinates for their attitudes and behaviors at workplace. A total 260 questionnaires

were distributed but 187 usable questionnaires were returned making response rate 71%.

Demographic Statistics

A total of 85% of the respondents were male, 75% were married. Majority of the respondents (35%) were between the ages of 31 to 35. The sample was well educated; 35% of the respondents had PhD degrees, while 58% were MS/MPhil degree holders. Majority of respondents were lecturers (49%). Of the respondents, 29% had 4 to 7 years and 1-3 years of experience in current organizations.

Measures:

We used 13 items perceptions of politics scale, developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). The reliability score was 0.93. Psychological Hardiness was measured using a scale developed by Hystad, Eid, Johnsen, Laberg and Bartone (2010) containing 15- item with reliability score of 0.95 while creativity was measured with a 13 items scale developed by Zhou and George (2001) with reliability score of 0.92. The incivility was measured using a 7-item scale developed by Cortina, Magley, Williams and Langhout (2001) with reliability score of 0.89.

Data Analysis and Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and the Structural Equation modeling (SEM) were used for data analyses. In the first phase CFA was used to assess convergent and discriminant validity. The second phase included path analysis using SEM. The overall fitness of the proposed four factor model was evaluated on parameters which include RMSEA, CFI, GFI, IFI and RMR.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Initially, to identify the suitability of data we performed the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using the maximum likelihood method. Bartlett's test of sphericity demonstrated that the factors in the all four constructs did not correlate with each other while factors of each construct were perfectly correlated. EFA results indicated low loadings for items 11, 12 13 of psychological hardiness, thus these items were dropped. The KMO above .80 is commendable; in this study KMO value of .870, significance of Bartlett's Test ($p < .001$) revealed data fit for further tests. Cumulative variance for 4-factor model was 53.667.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics shows the characteristics of the data set e.g., means, standard deviations and correlations. The mean (M) value for gender was 1.1 and SD (standard deviation) .35, for POP M= 3.4 SD= .99, Psychological hardiness M= 3.4 and SD = .62, employee

creativity $M= 3.6$, $SD= .77$ and workplace incivility $M= 4$ and $SD= .76$. The correlations are presented in Table I. The sample size was suitable and missing data were treated appropriately. Initially, a one-way ANOVA was employed to identify whether demographic variables influence the criterion variables, thus results indicated gender had significant impact on creativity. Rest of the variables like education, experience remain insignificant, thus were not controlled during analysis nor added for correlation analysis.

Correlation Analysis

Table 1. *Correlation Analysis*

Variables	Gender	POP	PHN	Creativity	Incivility
Gender	1				
Perception of politics	-.041	1			
Psychological hardiness	.082	-.175*	1		
Creativity	-.160*	-.222**	.556**	1	
Incivility	.002	.364**	-.203**	-.124	1

$P<.001^{**}$, $p<.005^{**}$, $p<.01^*$. POP = perception of politics, PHN indicates psychological hardiness

The results revealed that the direct associations are significant; perceptions of organizational politics are negatively correlated with creativity ($r = -.22^{**}$; $p, <.001$), and positively correlated with incivility ($r = .36^{***}$; $p < .001$). The results also revealed that perception of politics is negatively correlated with psychological hardiness ($r = -.17^*$; $p, <.001$).

Measurement Model Results

The results of CFA in table II revealed that items of measures e.g., perceptions of organizational politics, creativity and incivility loaded significantly; the magnitudes of the standardized loading of majority of these estimates were above 0.70, each item was a significant indicator of its underlying construct at $p<.001$. The results of CFA confirmed the following fit statistics: CMIN/DF 1.592; CFI .91; IFI .91; TLI .90; RMSEA .05 and met the criteria proposed by Haire et al. (2010) and Hu & Bentler (1999).

Thus, the results of fit statistics indicated an excellent fit for the proposed four-factor model to the data. The findings mutually provided evidence of convergent validity. Likewise, discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing this four-factor model with a three-factor model, two-factor model and single-factor model. The results for competing models indicated a bad fit for the statistics in comparison to our four-

factor model. Values were far lower from acceptable range e.g., CFI, IFI, TLI and RMSEA etc.

Table 2. Measurement model

Model		CMIN/DF	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Hypothesized model	4factor	1.592	.91	.91	.90	.05
Comparison 3factor model	with	2.953	.71	.71	.69	.10
Comparison 2factor model	with	4.601	.45	.46	.43	.13
Comparison single factor model	with	5.247	.37	.38	.35	.14

Structural Model Results

The results of SEM model are given in Table III. The results mentioned under path coefficients show that perceptions of politics significantly but negatively affect creativity ($\beta = -.21, p < .001$). Consequently, H1 is rejected, because we assumed significant positive relationship with the outcome variable. The results validate that perception of politics is significantly and positively related to incivility ($\beta = .36, p < .001$) thus, H2 is fully supported. Results also revealed that gender has significant impact on creativity ($\beta = .15, p < 0.01$). The effect has been controlled to get pure effect of exogenous variable on endogenous variable.

Table 3. Path Analysis for direct relationships

Variables		Path Coefficients	P value	
Perception of politics	→	Employee	-.21	**
Creativity				
Perception of politics	→	Workplace	.36	***
Incivility				
Gender	→		.15	**
Employee Creativity				

*P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

The results in table IV demonstrate the moderating role of psychological hardiness between perception of politics and workplace incivility. The interaction term’s result revealed significant effect on incivility ($\beta = .94, p < 0.01$). Thus, hypothesis H3 is partially accepted. Opposing our assumptions, it shows enhancing effect towards workplace incivility.

Table 4. Path Analysis for moderation

Variables	Path Coefficients	S.E	P value
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POP X Psychological Hardiness	→	.94	.09	**
Workplace Incivility				
POP=	Perception	of	politics	
*P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001				

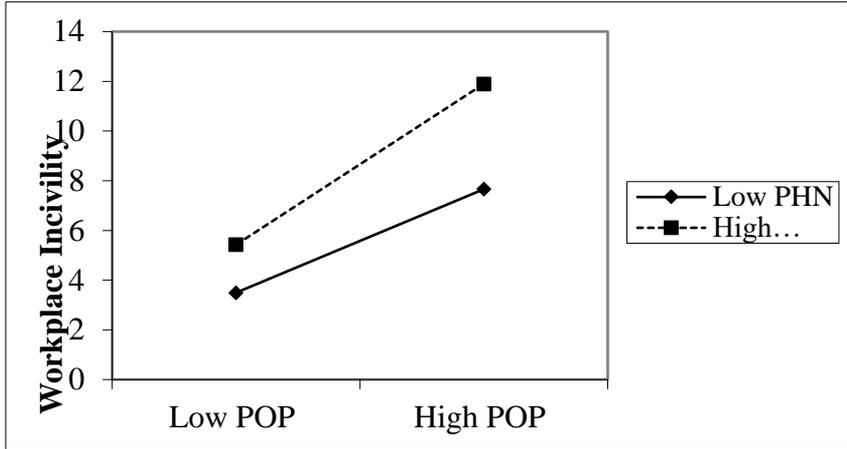


Figure 2. Slope of regression POP indicates perception of politics, PHN psychological hardiness.

The significant interaction term of perceived organizational politics x psychological hardiness was plotted for testing the two-way interaction by using simple slopes method. Figure 2 shows the behavioral pattern contrary to our expectations; instead of buffering effect it indicates enhancing effect towards workplace incivility. The slope of the relationship between POP and workplace incivility was relatively strong (and positive) for low and medium psychologically hard employees, whereas the slope was insignificant for highly psychologically hardy employees. Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

Generally, we found a good support for our hypotheses. We assumed significant positive relationship between employees’ perceptions of politics and their creativity. The results revealed that perception of politics acts as a barrier which lessens positivity which in turn reduces employee creativity. The results are consistent with earlier studies. When we see these findings in institutions of higher education in Pakistan, the respondents during informal interviews reported that key decisions like hiring, pay and promotions are based on favoritism which is the result of politics in these organizations. In such an environment, one can least expect that faculty will engage in creative activities like research and development. In line with other empirical studies, we found that when employees perceive higher level of politics they react in the

form of inappropriate behavior. These findings are important, as faculty members are expected to invest their time, effort, and potential energies simultaneously to be creative.

Furthermore, teachers working in a politically charged work environment display negative attitudes and behavior which not only hinders their creativity but also affects their career growth, their research expertise and organizational output. Individuals, who possess even strong personality traits, for example those who have self-control or those who are inclined to accept challenges or those who are committed towards achievements, do fall victim to this perceived negativity. In line with earlier predictions, we found that they don't continue with their standard behavior, become reactive and act as perpetrator of incivility.

Thus, the work environment needs to be monitored carefully, so that pressure can be managed effectively on teaching staff, ultimately ensuring the quality of teaching at higher education institutions. Furthermore, enhancing psychological hardiness skills through training is necessary as it can work as a coping mechanism for faculty members and help them in strengthening their creative work and promoting standard behavior. Consistent with previous theoretical frameworks, we found that different work environments prevail in the East and in the West, thus, how employees attribute things and react accordingly makes difference. Even highly qualified employees become pessimistic and reactive when they attribute a work environment with politics.

Limitations and future research directions

Although we tried to contribute to extant literature on perception of politics, we acknowledge that there are certain limitations in our study as well. For example, it might be fruitful to examine how high perceptions of organizational politics might encourage someone to indulge in politics as a reaction. Furthermore, our study only focused on academia with a limited sample size; future studies can study other sectors with larger samples. This study tested direct relationships as well as a moderating effect; future empirical studies could investigate possible mediating mechanisms for these relationships. Other possible outcomes, for example career success and aggression, although tested in western context, can be empirically tested in Pakistan.

Practical implications

This study is unique in nature as it emphasizes dual outcomes of perception of politics in higher educational institutions of Pakistan. The results of this study offer several useful practical implications related to the retention of positive perception of politics and minimization of perceived negativity in higher educational institutions. For example, political activity regarding acquisition of resources for creativity is appreciated. Management may take steps to promote a healthy environment, so that creativity can be ensured. Furthermore, fair policies

and ways for resource acquisition and promotions could help to reduce mistreatment. Moreover, universities can benefit their faculty members by implementing proper mechanisms in organizations, where employees' grievances related to management and coworkers' attitudes and behaviors can be entertained. It will also help to deal with ethical and moral issues in organizations. Additionally, universities can develop training sessions related to psychological hardiness to aid teachers who are targeted themselves or even become perpetrators of negative attitudes and behaviors, because the higher is the level of psychological hardiness the lower is the level of perceived negativity among employees.

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