



RESEARCH PAPER

Association between Perceived Organizational Politics and Intentions to Quit: Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion

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ABSTRACT

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This research investigates proposed associations between the perceived organizational politics on intentions to quit and emotional exhaustion. A sample of faculty members (N=220) from five higher education commission approved public sector universities of Islamabad participated. Data were collected by using non-probability sampling technique i.e. convenient. Participants provided information on socio-demographic variables and self-reported questionnaires on study variables. Psychometric properties of the study variables were found satisfactory. Regression analysis through statistical package for social sciences was carried out to test the hypotheses. Results indicated perceived organizational politics significantly related to intentions to quit, as well as to emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was also found to be positively related to intentions to quit. Further, emotional exhaustion partially mediated the relationship between perceived organizational politics and intentions to quit. Findings suggested that perceived organizational politics emotionally exhausts faculty members of the universities, leading them to have intentions to quit their jobs. Universities need to identify perceived organizational politics in the work environment and efforts need to be focused on addressing this phenomenon.

Introduction

Recently, scholars have well acknowledged that stressful factors such as perceived organizational politics engenders negative reactions in employees that can exacerbate the situation (Khan et al. 2021; Lawong et al. 2018). Perceived organizational politics (POP) is an individual's perception about the overall organizational environment where other members of organization are involved in

political actions and activities which may be beneficial for them but can harm others (Khan et al.,2018). Scholar elucidated that POP is a combination of power, influence and behavior directed towards one's own interest (Khan et al.,2017). POP is considered as a hindrance stressor at workplace (Abbas et. al., 2014) and harmful consequences for employees (Khan et. al., 2018).

Perceived organizational politics has been reportedly associated with diverse organizational and personal outcomes, namely, reduced job satisfaction (Khan et al.,2019), job stress and reduced organizational commitment (Khan et al, 2018). It also impacts negatively on organizational citizenship behavior, in-role performance (Byrne, 2005), and boost turnover intentions (Jordan et al., 2018), burnout and low performance at work (Harris, Andrews, &Kacmar, 2007). It is commonly associated with job related negative emotions, workplace incivility and attitudes (Khan et al.,2017), job tension as well as emotional exhaustion (Hall et al., 2017; Lawong et al., 2018). Considering the importance of this phenomenon, past research studies (Hall et al., 2017; Lawong et al., 2018) recommended to study the impact of POP on emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in work settings in non-western country. Moreover, substantial studies conducted in western and local context research has been carried out in the field of manufacturing, telecommunications, banking, and multinational retail organizations (Abbas et al., 2014), public and private corporate sectors (Abbas et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2017; Khalid & Ahmed, 2016).

Past studies conducted in the academia has addressed POP among teachers, though negative impact of POP has been found among teachers work motivation and specific job attitudes (Khan et al.,2017). Moreover, negative impacts of POP in teaching environment have been found even on the students and overall learning work environment and affects the productivity to perform better (Evers, Tomic & Brouwers 2004; Jennings & Greenberg 2009).Several studies have focused on the study of specific burnout profiles in teachers(Salmela-Aro et al., 2019; Mäkikangas et al., 2020; Pyhältö et al., 2021) as cited in (Llorca-Pellicer, Soto-Rubio & Gil-Monte.,2021).Existence of political games may distort the healthy educational environment, thus it is worthy to find out the mechanism of POP and its outcomes among teachers to curb its overall impact on the functioning of educational institutes as it affects adversely (Gencer et al., 2018).

Based on this, the present research seeks to examine the phenomenon of POP among university faculty members that whether it causes emotional exhaustion and whether this further adds to quit the organization? To address these questions, we employed Social stressors theory (Aneshensel, 1992) which states that stressful antecedents (like POP) can lead to exhaustion and burnout. Hence, the current study investigated the impact of perceived organizational politics that leads to emotionally exhausts university teachers and ultimately the employees tend to quit the organization in the higher education sector of Pakistan.

Literature Review

Perceived Organizational Politics (POP)

Perception of organizational politics is “An attribution of intent regarding the behavior of other organizational members that these behaviors are interpreted as self-serving actions engaged in by others, and that the perceptions involve individuals’ subjective feelings regarding political behavior in the work environment” (Ferris et al., 2002, p, 185). Impact of POP on personal well-being (e.g. burnout) and organizational outcomes (e.g. reduced commitment, incivility, turn over intention) and place besides performing his work roles, hence affecting quality of his work performance, which in turn tend to affect organizational performance in the long run. This argument is supported by empirical findings repeatedly highlighting POP negatively affecting employees’ well-being as well as organizational outcomes. POP has been found associated with a diverse attitudinal and behavioral outcome for example, job satisfaction (Khan et al.,2018; khan et al.,2019), organizational citizenship behavior, in-role performance (Byrne, 2005), burnout and low performance at work (Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2007), job related negative emotions and outcomes (Khan et al.,2021) producing job tension as well as emotional exhaustion (Hall et al., 2017). Of many attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of POP, intention to quit seems very important, as intention to leave is a strong predictor of actual turnover (Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2007).

POP and Emotional Exhaustion

Scholars have characterized POP as source of stress and stress related factors leading to poor health of employees (Ferris et al., 1996 ; Khan et al., 2019) job anxiety and withdrawal behaviors (Valle &Perrewe, 2000), turnover intentions, burnout (Harris et al.,2007), emotional exhaustion (Vigoda, 2002), anxiety and tension (Howard & Cordes, 2010) fatigue, tension and eventually burnout symptoms (Vigoda, 2002). Efforts to cope with such situation result in depletion of emotional resources thus exhaust a person emotionally (Karatepe & Karatepe, 2009).A highly demanding and political job environment may exhaust a person emotionally and compels him to behave cynically with others (Lee & Ashforth, 1990; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Harris, James, and Boonthanom (2005) postulated that perceived politics in organization exerts stressful impact on employees and they may become emotionally exhausted (Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009).

Thus, we proposed that:

H1. POP positively affects emotional exhaustion

POP and Intentions to Quit

According to Kacmar and Ferris, (1991) POP includes three factors namely general political behavior, go along to get ahead, and pay and promotion policies. This last factor namely pay and promotion policies is related to the way

organizations behave politically while implementing the policies (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991 as cited in Kacmar & Carlson, 1997, p, 629; Kacmar & Ferris, 1993; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997, p, 631). Such practices in the organizations, e.g., inequitable reward, unfairness and discrimination in the organization lead employees to behave in a negative way, show anger and distress and intentions to quit job (Adebayo, Sunmola, & Udegbe, 2008). Employees who perceive discrimination in rewards from the organization more likely engage in political behaviors themselves (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997, p, 631). These predictors of intentions to quit have been researched widely in past literature including hostile attribution style of individuals at workplace (Harvey, Harris, & Martinko, 2008), unfairness and discrimination in rewards and promotion policies (Oluwafemi, 2013) and POP in their environment (Khan et al., 2021). Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H2. POP positively affects intentions to quit

Emotional Exhaustion and Intentions to Quit

POP leads to emotional exhaustion (Valle & Perrewe, 2000), which is the major outcome studied in reaction to perceived organizational politics (Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008). Based on conceptualization of burnout (developed by Maslach & Jackson, 1981), emotional exhaustion has been defined as a characteristic having depletion of energy and emotional resources to cope with stress (Goodman & Boss, 2002). Emotional exhaustion at workplace results in various forms of negative outcomes e.g., low productivity and commitment, lack of job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999), back biting, anger, work negligence, deviance and absenteeism (Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009), various forms of emotional sufferings that eventually results in sickness, absenteeism and quit intentions (Howard & Cordes, 2010). Podsakoff et al. (2007) also suggested that different forms of workplace stressors lead to employees' withdrawal behaviors, intentions to quit and actual turnover while major form of stress is depicted in emotional exhaustion state which leads employees to many negative outcomes mainly intentions to quit (Ducharme, Knudsen, & Roman, 2007). Thus, we hypothesized that:

H3. Emotional exhaustion positively affects intentions to quit

Mediating role of Emotional Exhaustion

There is strong relationship between POP and stress and anxiety at workplace (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996; Ferris et al., 2002). Evidence from past indicate a pathway in which POP leads to exhaustion state of employees and in reaction employees intend to quit their job (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Howard & Cordes, 2010; Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009). Empirical studies found that the stress resulting from POP adversely impacts job performance of the employees and they intent quitting their jobs (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2007). POP brings negative consequences like Job performance, Job

satisfaction, OCB (Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009), job involvement, job anxiety and withdrawal behaviors (Valle & Perrewe, 2000), turnover intentions, burnout (Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2007) and emotional exhaustion (Vigoda, 2002). In the light of afore-mentioned studies, we hypothesized that:

H4. Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between POP and intentions to quit

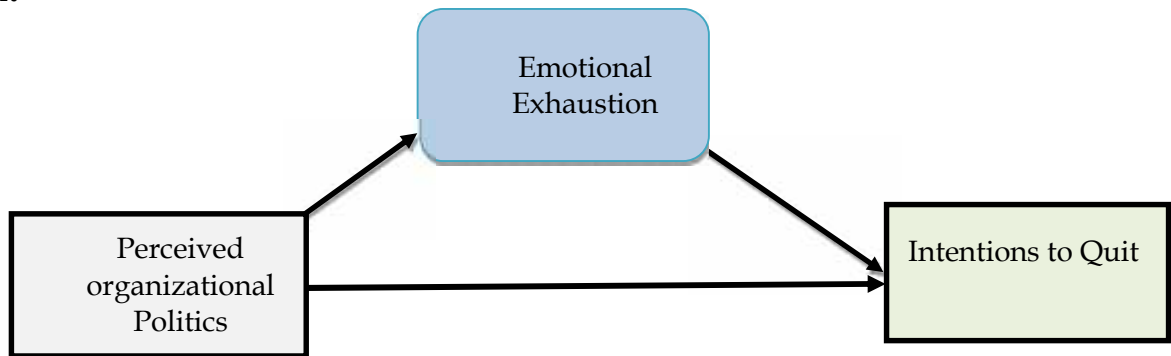


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Material and Method

Design of Study

A quantitative study has been implied to test out hypotheses. Specifically, the current study follows a cross sectional survey design method for the collection of data from five public sector Universities located in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Sample Description

For present study a sample of 220 teachers were contacted for collecting data from the teaching faculty of five (5) higher education commission (HEC) approved public sector universities of Islamabad namely Air University, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Bahria University, National University of Modern Languages (NUML) and Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad) were selected out of total fifteen (15). Sample size was determined using rule of thumb method as proposed by Kline (2005). Initially 250 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 220 were received back, making response rate as 88 percent. Sample of this study included, 46.4 % males and 53.6% female, relatively there were more females (53.6%) than males (46.4 %), the age range of the participants was 21 to 60 years. Most participants (82.7%) were holding MS or PhD degrees whereas; only 17.3% were having MA/MSc degrees. Total work experience was as follows: 3.6% were having less than 1-year experience, 30.9% have 6-10 years and 51.9% were having over 10 years of experience.

Control Variables

As in past literature Mobley, Griffeth, Hand and Meglino (1979) suggested that age, tenure, gender, education and personality may affect the employees' decision of quitting job. Similarly, variables such as age, gender, work tenure (Byrne, 2005), education (Vigoda, 2002) and marital status have been found having effect on perceptions of organizational politics (Jamil, Raja, & Darr, 2013) and its relationship with emotional exhaustion and intentions to quit, therefore these variables were statistically controlled in the present study while testing the hypotheses.

Measures

Response format for all scales ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree).

Perceived Organizational Politics

POP was measured using 15-item Perceived Organizational Politics scale (POPs) developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). This scale has been used in previous studies (Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2007; Khalid & Ahmed, 2016) and alpha reliability has been reported as 0.87, for present study alpha reliability for this scale was 0.94. Sample items in this scale include: "People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down".

Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional Exhaustion was measured with the nine-item emotional exhaustion sub scale of Burnout scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). This sub scale has been previously used (Hall et al., 2017; Tuxford & Bradley, 2015) and alpha reliability was reported as 0.87, 0.89, and .90. For present study, alpha reliability of this scale was 0.81. Example of the item from this scale include: "I feel emotionally drained from my work".

Intentions to Quit

To assess intentions to quit, three-item scale of turnover intentions by Shore, Newton, and Thornton (1990) adapted from original MOAQ (Michigan organizational assessment questionnaires) was used. This scale has been used in previous studies (Park et al., 2016), alpha reliability for this scale has been reported as 0.84, and 0.92. For present study, it was 0.90. Sample items were "I often think about quitting".

Procedure of Data Collection

Data were collected through survey technique by onsite administration of questionnaires during working hours. A cover letter indicating the purpose of study

and maintaining confidentiality of the responses of participants was provided to the participants followed by consent form. Participants provided information on socio-demographic and job-related variables (gender, age, education, marital status and total work experience) as well.

Results and Discussion

For present study, all analyses were performed using SPSS 20 (2007) while controlling the variables i.e., gender, age, education, marital status, and total work experience in the first step of regression analysis. Mediation analysis was carried out using Baron and Kenny's (1986) three step mediation procedure.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, Correlations, and Alpha Reliabilities coefficients (N=220)

Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	1	2	3
1. POP	3.12	.88	.26	-. (.94)	.30**	.30**
2. EE	3.44	.70	.44		-. (.81)	.38**
3. ITQ	3.67	1.06	-.88			(.90)

Note. POP= Perceived organizational politics, ITQ= Intentions to quit, EE= Emotional exhaustion. Alpha Reliability coefficients are in parenthesis. **P< 0.01

Table 1 is reflecting the descriptive statistics, alpha reliability coefficients and Pearson correlation among all the study variables. POP had a positive correlation with intentions to quit ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), as well as with emotional exhaustion ($r = .30$, $p < .001$). Emotional exhaustion was significantly correlated with intentions to quit ($r = .38$, $p < .00$). The internal consistency for all the study variables was acceptable; it exceeds .70, as recommended by Nunnally (1978). Data set was normally distributed as shown in skewness values ranging from 0.26 to 0.88, which is within normal range (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

For testing mediation, Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation analyses procedure was used. Direct impact of IV on DV is tested prior to testing indirect paths. First DV is regressed on IV followed by regressing mediator on IV. Then DV is regressed on mediator while controlling for IV. In final step DV is regressed on IV while controlling for mediator, as a result reduction of the magnitude of Beta indicates partial mediation, whereas, in case of full mediation value of Beta becomes non-significant.

Table 2
Mediated Regression analysis predicting impact of POP and emotional exhaustion on intentions to quit (N = 220)

Predictors	Emotional Exhaustion		Intentions to Quit			
	B	R ²	R ²	B	R ²	R ²
Direct effect:						
POP						

Step 1							
Control variables		0.02				0.01	
Step 2							
POP	0.14	0.12	0.1	0.06		0.1	0.08
Mediation effect: E.E							
Step 1							
Control Variables						0.01	
Step 2							
Emotional exhaustion				0.13		0.19	0.08
Step 3							
POP				0.03		0.19	0.03

Note. *EE = Emotional exhaustion, * POP= Perceived Organizational politics.

Table 2 indicates the direct and indirect effects of mediation analysis. Testing direct effects revealed significant positive relationship between POP and intentions to quit ($B = .06, p < .001$) supporting our hypothesis1 which stated positive and significant relationship between POP and intentions to quit. Moreover, testing indirect effects, the first step of mediation shows that the relationship between POP and emotional exhaustion (mediator) was also significant ($B = .15, p < .001$) supporting our hypothesis2 regarding positive relationship between POP and emotional exhaustion. In second step, intentions to quit was regressed on emotional exhaustion after controlling for POP, which resulted in positive association between emotional exhaustion and intentions to quit ($B = .13, p < .01$), hence hypothesis3 of present study about positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and intentions to quit was also supported. In the final step, emotional exhaustion was controlled followed by regressing intentions to quit on POP which resulted in reduced magnitude of B (from $B = .06$ to $B = .03$), showing partial mediation and supporting our last hypothesis4 which anticipated mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between POP and intentions to quit.

Discussion

Present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between POP and intentions to quit and the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the higher education sector of Pakistan. The empirical findings of the relationship between POP and intentions to quit, were supported by (Abbas et al., 2014; Ferris et al., 2002) and demonstrated that where employees perceived organizational politics in their work environment had intentions to quit their jobs. Moreover, significant relationship between POP and emotional exhaustion was also found which is consistent with previous studies (Hall et al., 2017; Naseer et al., 2016; Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009)

and asserted POP as threatening factor contributing to harmful effects (Vigoda.,2002; Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Ferris et al., 2002).

Additionally, the present research empirically tested the relationship between Emotional exhaustion and intentions to quit. Our findings are consistent with past research where stress and emotional exhaustion has been found leading to many negative work outcomes, e.g., low morale of employee, low performance, decreased organizational commitment including turnover intentions (Babakus et al., 1999; Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Ducharme, Knudsen, & Roman,2007). Regarding the findings of our last hypothesis, emotional exhaustion significantly mediated the relationship between POP and intentions to quit and was consistent with (Hall et al., 2017; Naseer et al., 2016; Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009). Khan et al. (2018) asserted POP as threatening factor contributing frustration in employees and responsible for harmful effects (Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Ferris et al., 2002).

According to social stressor theory, our findings revealed that stressful atmosphere affects the efficiency and productivity of workforce leading to many negative work outcomes, e.g., low morale of employee, low performance, decreased organizational commitment including turnover intentions (Babakus et al., 1999; Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Ducharme, Knudsen, & Roman,2007). Finally, this study indicated the significant mechanism that acts as a mediator (emotional exhaustion) in the relationship between POP and intentions to quit. Thus, it is noteworthy that in negatively politically charged environment where employees lack resources to cope up with negative effects of politics leads faculty members to emotionally exhaust and engenders intentions to quit their job.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study had following limitations: Due to time constraint, data on study variables were collected only from single source (i.e. Teacher's point of view) on study variables which might cause common method variance and can reduce the significant effects (Evans, 1985; Spector, 2006). Therefore, we suggest collecting data from management point of view in future studies. Another limitation of present study was that data was collected through a survey questionnaire using quantitative methods only, in future qualitative data may also be collected, and qualitative data through interviews can help in finding details of the relationship between POP and intentions to quit. Moreover, in future same study may be conducted using longitudinal research design, as the cross-sectional data do not address causality which can be addressed through longitudinal research design (George & Jones, 2000; Harris et al., 2007).

Data were collected with a small sample size from public sector universities of one city Islamabad, future studies, may take sample from private sectors, as well as from other cities of Pakistan. Future studies may study role of perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support (Naseer et al., 2016) leader-member exchange relations and trust in organization (Olckers & Enslin, 2016)in

order to examine their mitigating role in the relationship between POP and intentions to quit.

Conclusion

POP was found positively related to intentions to quit as well as emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was positively related to intentions to quit. Emotional exhaustion partially mediated the relationship between POP and intentions to quit. Overall, it was found that faculty members in our sample get emotionally exhausted when they perceive of politics around them, as a result they intend leaving their institutions. Our findings are consistent with the past research.

Our research provides important information not only about emotional exhaustion due to perceived organizational politics but also their intention to quit their job. The phenomenon of POP due to its adverse impact should be given considerable attention in educational institutes. Findings of our research gives practical insight for the management of universities to take practical measures for reducing/eliminating organizational politics in the universities which in turn leads to intentions to quit.

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