

Organizational Politics: It's Influence on Firms

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Abstract

Organizational politics plays a large role in how most businesses function and develop. Humans are political animals so it is difficult to prevent politics from the work place. Organizational politics have so many influences on the affairs and behavior of employees in an organization. However, there has been limited study in this area in Ghana specifically and Africa as a whole. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of organizational politics on business entities within Accra metropolis, Ghana. Two large business organizations were chosen within the metropolis. In addition, forty (40) questionnaires were distributed to forty (40) respondents thus; twenty (20) for each organizational setup. It was concluded that political factors such as increase anxiety and stress, create hostile organizational environment and climate of mistrust were dominant negative political influences on organizations. The researchers recommended both management and employees to set aside their personal interests and go along with the mission of the organization for the achievement of stated goals.

Key words:- Organizations, Organizational politics, political behavior

Introduction

Organizational politics is arguably one of the most researched concepts in the field of management. Many studies such as Gandz & Murray, 1980; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992 have been carried out on different aspects of organizational politics. Organizational politics have been studied in many jurisdictions (Vigoda, 2000 in Israel; Ogbhojofor & Muo, 2012 in Nigeria; Ladebo, 2006 in Nigeria,). Unfortunately, not much studies have been conducted in Ghana. As a result, this study seeks to examine the influence of organizational politics in the Ghanaian context.

Organizational politics is the pursuit of individual agendas and self-interest in an organization without regard to their effect on the organizations efforts to achieve its goals (McShane and Von Glinow, 2005).

Perhaps, Organizational politics is the use of power to affect decision making. It is also, when individuals have divergent views about how resources are to be used and mobilized. How

rewards are to be distributed as well as how punishments are to be meted out. These opposing views are of a major concern to both employees and managers as they form the major causes of political struggle for resources. The reasons are pragmatic; the extreme forms of illegitimate political behavior pose a real risk of losing organizational membership or incurring extreme sanctions. Interview with experience managers shows that most people believe political behavior is a major part of organizational life. Majority of the managers reported that certain level of political behavior is both ethical and necessary, as long as it does not directly harm anyone (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2007).

Politics is described as a necessary evil and someone who never uses political behavior will have a hard time achieving goals. Most managers also indicated they had not been trained to use political behavior effectively (Robbins and Judge, 2010). Organizations are made up of people with different values, goal and interest. Due to allocation of limited resources in organization, not everyone's interest can be satisfied. This creates competition among members (Vigoda-Gadot, 2002).

It is an undisputable fact that, over the years organizations have battled with organizational politics and are still putting in all possible efforts to handle this problem so as not to affect the achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Robbins and Judge, 2010). The focus of this research is to identify and rank in the highest order the various political factors in the selected organizations.

Literature Review

The body of literature on organizational politics is expanding but still the research remains distorted with respect to theory and research methodologies adopted. Despite a lot of empirical data, conceptual vagueness still exists. Organizational politics is proved to be fact of life (Vigoda-Gadot, 2000).

Regardless of the widespread acceptance of presence of organizational politics proved by empirical research this aspect of life at workplace remained polemic. Before 1970s organizational politics was considered as verboten in the field of management. Organizational politics started getting attention when the concept of organizational rationality was challenged because of the emergence of concepts like person-organization misfit, and incompatibility of personal and organizational goals. The concept of organizational rationality was based on the idea that individuals decide their goals by keeping in view the organizational goals and are expected to work for the achievement of their personal goals according to the rules and regulations of the organization. But a realistic picture of life at workplace showed the existence of conflicting goals within the organization. This existence of conflicting goals in organizations gave birth to organizational politics.

Organizational politics has proved to be a significant part of both public and private organizations, therefore researchers argue for the need of further investigation of the issue (Drory & Romm, 1990; DuBrin, 1988; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983; Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992).

To Zanzi and O'Neill's (2001) definitions of organizational politics fall into two broad categories (cited in Othman, 2008). The first is organizational politics as negative and involves self-serving and unsanctioned behavior. Such behaviors are divisive, illegitimate, dysfunctional and conflict achieving (Gilmore et al, 1996). The second view perceives politics in a more neutral light and accepts that it can sometimes be functional (Kumar and Ghadially, 1989). Pfeffer (1981) for instance, defined politics as a social function that can contribute to the basic functioning of organizations.

Influence of Organizational Politics on employees

Organizational politics have many influences on the behavior of workers in the workplace. Among these influences are:

Equity: Leaders have to engage in politics to achieve goals. But the litmus test should be why they use politics. If political tactics are used to advance causes in the organization that serve to benefit everyone equally, then they are more likely to be seen as purposeful and legitimate (Simmons, 2009)

Power, influence and politics have some effect on every member of an organization and thus on the entire organizational unit. Based on the equity theory (Adams, 1965) and on the idea of social exchange and social reciprocity (Blau, 1964), the motivation to perform better and the development of positive employee attitudes and behaviors, depend on the display of similar positive attitudes and behaviors by other four members of the organization (peers, supervisors, the management and the organizations as a whole). Therefore, many scholars have argued that the relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is an important one that deserves careful and thorough investigation (Ferris & Kacmar, 1991; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Zhou & Ferris, 1995) and one that has the potential to enhance our understanding of multiple aspects of performance.

Promotion: According to (Robbins and Judge, 2010) promotion decisions have consistently been found to be one of the most political actions in organizations. The opportunity for promotion or advancement encourages people to compete for limited resources and try to positively influence the decision outcome.

Power: There is some confusion concerning the proximate terms which are often represented together when organizational politics is discussed. The most commonly used and definitely one of the most important synonymous is "power". It has been widely recognized that both politics and power are significant part of human behavior as they affect the ability to secure one's goals and interests in a social system. (Vigoda, 2003).

Consequences of Organizational Politics

The consequences of organizational politics are grouped into two viz; individual and organizational consequences.

1. Organizational level consequences: The impact of organizational politics is very critical in nature. Political behaviors are found to have both functional and dysfunctional effects at organizational levels. Employee involvement in organizational politics affects organizational performance, effectiveness, decision making, and change processes within the organization (Buchanan & Badham, 2007). Studies with narrow definition of organizational politics found it negatively related to performance of organizations (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010). Madison et al. (1979) found organizational performance to be positively related to the involvement of managers in organizational politics. Managers highly involved in organizational politics were found to be achieving goals with the help of organizational politics. Therefore managerial involvement in organizational politics was proposed to be necessary for the survival of the organization (Madison et al., 1979). Organizational politics is also found to be negatively related to the employee perception about fairness and justice within the organizational setup and processes (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Aryee, Chen, & Budhwar, 2004; Beugre & Liverpool, 2006; Ferris et al., 1995).

2. Individual level consequences. Positive perception about organizational politics was related to satisfaction with job, supervisor, and work environment (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer, & Betternhausen, 2008). Madison et al. (1979) found loss of power, and key position to be the main dysfunctional effects at individual level consequences because of involvement in organizational politics. However stress, dissatisfaction, and anxiety are the other dysfunctional consequences (Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008) of employees involvement in organizational politics. Individual level consequences also play very important role in the smooth functioning and achievement of organizational goals.

METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was used in this study. This design is considered suitable because of its ability to view comprehensively the major questions raised in the study. Survey research design is described by Denscombe (2003) as an efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents and the ability to use statistical techniques to determine statistical significance. The population of the study comprised the employees and management of two renewed banks within the Accra metropolis.

The convenient sampling technique was employed in this study. A sample size of thirty (30) was targeted for each company. The choice of this sample size is guided by literature on the maximum and minimum practical sample size of not less than thirty (30) subjects per group category for any statistical test (Balian, 1994; Denscombe, 2003). The primary data was obtained from the respondents through a carefully constructed questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to capture the demographic data of respondents and their opinion with respect to the research questions.

The questionnaire was divided into two (2) sections. Section A was designed to obtain information on the demographic and subject details of respondents, while section B consisted of questions to determine the influence of organizational politics on organizations. The questionnaire was constructed using a five-point Likert type scale. The respondents were required to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each of the statements on a score of one (1) to five (5). A score of one (1) represented strong agreement with the statement, while a score of five (5) represented strong disagreements. The data were later ranked based on the frequencies and agreement with the statements posed. This type of scaling was suggested when items are to be judged on a single dimension and arrayed on a scale with equal interval (Alreck and Settle, 1995). The data collected were analyzed descriptively. The descriptive method was used to both demography of respondents and the research questions on organizational politics using frequencies and percentages. Analyses were carried out with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, (SPSS Version 15.0).

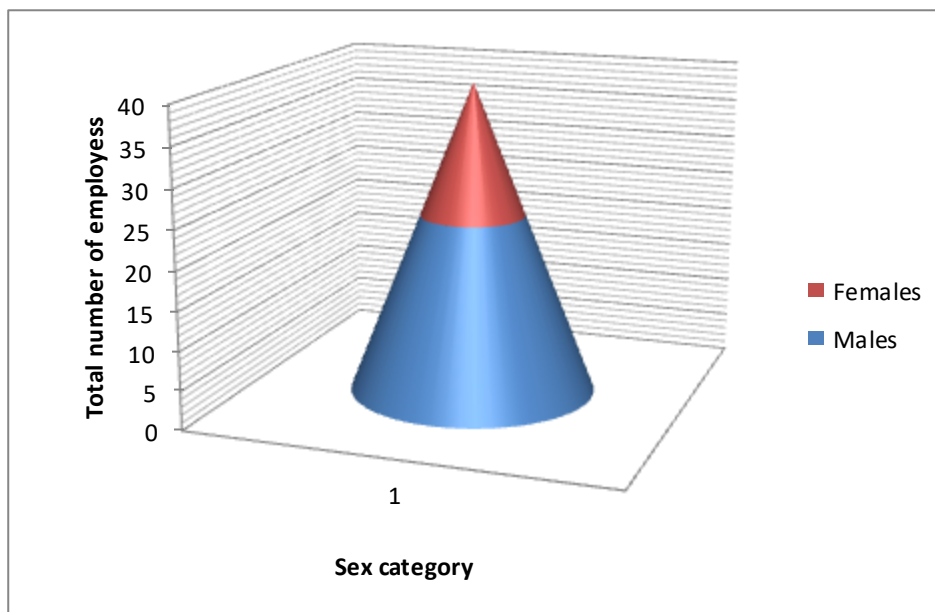
Discussion of Findings

Demographic Data

Gender

The respondents were made up of twenty three (23) males and seventeen (17) females.

Fig 1- Gender distribution of respondents

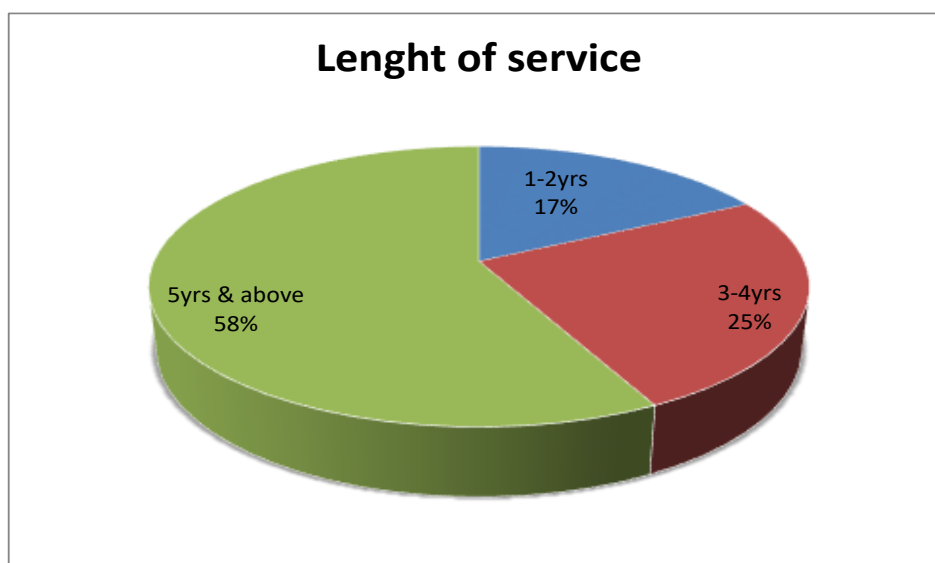


Source: Field survey, 2012.

Work experience of respondents

In order to determine the experience of respondents, they were asked to tick the number of years spent on the current job. By inference, the more number of years the more the experience on the job and in-depth knowledge of politics involved in it. This was important because recognition of and involvement in organizational politics comes with years on the job. A year on the job would only give the employee a glimpse of its effect. This was also important for the rating the effect of the various political factors. The results in figure 2 below revealed that, seven (7) out of the total number of respondents had worked between 1-2years, ten (10) between 3-4 years and twenty-three (23) from five (5) years and above.

Fig.2- Length of Service of Respondents



Source: Field survey, 2012

The Influence of Organizational Politics on Organization

Table 1- Ranking of organisational factors

STATEMENT	RESPONSE		RANK
THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS ON ORGANIZATIONS	Agreement with the statements		
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Fosters justice and fairness	23	57.5	6 th
Promote selflessness	30	75	3 rd
Create hostile organizational environment	31	77.5	2 nd
Reallocation of resources	14	35	10 th
Enhance interpersonal relationship	17	42.5	9 th
Promote equity	22	55	8 th
Improve employee efficiency and effectiveness	27	67.5	5 th
Create a climate of mistrust	30	75	3 rd
Increase anxiety and stress	34	85	1 st
Defensiveness	23	57.5	6 th

Source: field survey, 2012

The findings of these results are based on the responses of respondents relating to only strongly agree and agree. The rest such as neutral, disagree and strongly disagree were not used for the analysis seen in the table 1 above.

In table 1 above, respondents were asked to rate the factors that indicate organizational politics from the most influential to the least. The responses indicated that among the ten (10) factors: "increased anxiety and stress" came up as number one (1) as was indicated by 85% of the respondents. This was followed by "Create hostile organizational environment" as was indicated by 77.5% of the respondents.

The third most prominent influential factor of organizational politics as per the responses is "Promote selflessness" and "Create a climate of mistrust". From the responses given by the respondents, these two are the third as indicated by 75% of the respondents. The fifth ranked influence of organization politics on the organization is it "improves employee efficiency and effectiveness" as supported by 67.5% of the respondents.

The sixth ranked factor had two influences from the responses given by the respondents. These are Fosters justice and fairness and Defensiveness which had 57.5% each. The eighth ranked influence of organization politics is "promote equity" which also had 55%. The ninth ranked influence is reallocation of resources as it got 42.5% from the respondents.

The last ranked influence an organizational politics have on the organization is it “enhances interpersonal relationship” in the organization as asserted by 35% of the respondents.

The data presented above, it was realized that among the influence that organizational politics have on the organization, the ones that portray negative influence comes first as was seen from table 1 above. These factors are increase anxiety and stress, create hostile organizational environment and create climate of mistrust. From the literature reviewed when an organization is faced by such perception from employees, it affect the performance of the organization in a negatively. Organizations that are characterized by climates of mistrust, anxiety and stress, defensiveness, low support, and poor communication are very difficult ones in relation to effective performance. (Heneman, Ledford & Gresham, 2000).

Unfortunately, influences of organizational politics such as fostering justice and fairness, Improve employee efficiency and effectiveness, enhance interpersonal relationship and promote equity which can go a long way to influence employees to be efficient and effective in order to achieve goals and objectives were the least ranked by the respondents. This indicates that employees from the sampled organisations see political influence in their respective organizations as negative influence than that of positive influence. The findings of this research follow an early study of Byrne (2005) who suggested fairness as a good moderator of several relationships. Generally speaking, perceiving the organizational environment as fair reduced the negative covert effect of organizational politics on job performance. Selflessness of individuals or groups in pursuing personal goals through political behavior is considered as threat to other behavior in the organization (Porter, Allen, & Angel, 1981).

As the study concluded differently from that of Porter, Allen and Angle (1981), which states that “fairness in organizational environment reduces the negative covert effect of organizational politics on job performance”, this could cause negative covert effect on the banks understudy.

Conclusion

Organizational politics are an unavoidable factor governing the work place. Organizational politics influences organizational behavior positively or negatively. Most of the respondents were males and had worked for over five years. Positive influences of organizational politics are; helps foster justice, improve efficiency and effectiveness of workers, promote equity, and enhance interpersonal relationship. The study concluded that workers of sampled banks ranked the negative influence of politics on organizations such as increase anxiety and stress create hostile organizational environment and create climate of mistrust as the most influential factors of politics on their organization. This implies that, both companies feel the negative impact of organizational politics than its positive factors. By this study, organizational politics affects performance negatively. Therefore, managers should control and coordinate activities within the organization with strategic plans towards achievement of goals and minimize organizational politics factors. Measures should be put in place to curtail the negative effect of organizational politics. Organizational politics when critically managed has its advantages/

Recommendations

- Both management and employees should set aside their personal interest whiles at the work place.

- Management and employees should have good interpersonal relationship so as to identify the needs of employees and provide them in order to create a peaceful environment, prevent division and conflict between management and employees.
- The bureaucracy in an organizations political system can be like that of a government agency. Therefore, for a manager to get his ideas implemented he needs to be part of the political process.
- Organizations should create committees to conduct research before taking important organizational decisions.
- Teamwork and employee efficacy is important in order to understand the structure of the organization and therein the politics they choose to employ.

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