

# Effect of Organizational Politics on Organizational Goals and Objectives

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## Abstract

Organizational politics is something most people recognize when they see it in action, but find it difficult to define. Organizational politics has been viewed as either good or bad. However, organizational politics is not necessarily a bad thing and it is certainly not avoidable. This study sought to emphasize that politics is an important element of an organization that should constantly receive attention because of its impact on organization goals and objectives. The study used survey research design to generate data from a sample size of 152 employees using simple random sampling technique. In order to test the hypotheses formulated, the researcher used correlation analysis to determine the direction and strength of the relationship that exists between the variables. Results from the analysis of data showed that organizational politics is negatively related to achievement of organizational goals (-0.224) and also negatively related to achievement of harmony among the functional departments of an organization (-0.469). The study therefore concluded that Organizational performance can be enhanced by trying to providing a working environment free of politics in their organizations. The study also recommends that the chief executive of the organization should ensure that the management of functional areas should be devoid of politics and that management must use skills and competencies as a yardstick for decision making.

## Introduction

An organization is made up of people managing and coordinating other resources for the achievement of stated objectives within an unstable and complex environment. Because people are involved and because the organization always fails to live up to its expectations in terms of rationality and objectivity, political behaviors become commonality and objectivity, political behaviors become commonplace. Politics may be positive (collaborative) or negative (destructive and competitive) but the fact is that no organization exists without politics (Yusuf, 2008). There are two ways of viewing organizational politics: either as a symptom of social influence processes that benefit the organization, or a self-serving effect that goes against the organizational goals. Recent study by Robbins, Judge and Sanghi (2008) highlight that politics has a lot of potential consequences on work outcome and can affects organizational processes such as; decision making, promotion, rewards and among others either positively or negatively.

For a general manager to move an organization forward, he must strive to balance the viewpoints of all the departments in the organization. Several departments in an organization

are unendingly in conflict with each other. This conflict can be ascribed to the fact that one department tries to prioritize its operations over the activities of all other departments, hence, the practice of politics. The Webster Dictionary defines politics as competition between interest groups or individuals for power and leadership.

Organizational politics is something most people recognize when they see it in action, but find it difficult to define. This implies that organizational politics is not necessarily a bad thing and it certainly is not avoidable. Knowing that it is unavoidable, the question to be asked is "how can the management cope with organizational politics?"

Organizational politics described as an activity that permits people in organization to accomplish goals without going through proper channels. Whether political activities assist or harm the organization depends on whether the goals of individuals are consistent with the goals of organization. There has no doubt that political beliefs are an ordinary observable fact in every organization. Organizational politics represented devious behavior of employees towards their work environment only for their self-interests. These self-interests may be at the cost of other employees or may be organizational goals as well (Shamaila and Aiyla, 2012) Organizational politics is an important ingredient of the life of organization, which refers to behavior in which personal interests are safeguarded rather than organizational interests. The concept of organizational politics, well established now, has been well-defined by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) and they viewed it as "it is the amount to which employees observe their work setting as political in nature which result to make them feel their environment unfair and unjust".

Organizational politics is important since it provides an understanding of the informal processes of conflicts and co-operations in organizations, and their impact on the organizational performance. Many people regard organizational politics as something negative (e.g., pursuing self-interests at the expense of others) and something to be minimized. Consequently, although most people know that organizational politics are common, they avoid saying so when it concerns one's own behavior. It is more common to talk about politics when complaining about a loss to a friend than it is in the context of one's own political maneuvering. When we win on an issue, we call it leadership; when we lose, we call it politics. In many organizations, politics is a taboo subject, which makes it difficult for individuals to deal with this crucially important aspect of organizational reality. Leaders must skillfully use organizational politics to acquire and retain power and to accomplish major goals. Therefore, it would be a mistake to pretend that politics does not exist or to fantasize that a leader can be effective without appropriate (and ethical) use of politics. As Pericles wrote over 2500 years ago, "Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."

Therefore, this study tries to emphasize that politics is an important element of an organization that should constantly receive attention because of its impact on organization goals and objectives.

### **Literature Review**

There is no doubt that internal politics is a common practice at work place in every organization. The nature and boundary of such politics is argued differently by many researchers, practitioners and even respondents (interviewees) of both Zenith Bank Nigeria Plc and Alcon Nigeria Plc.(Ugwu, Ndugbu, Okoroji and Kalu , 2014) Organizational politics involves intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups (Kreitner & Kinicki 2013). In other words, Schuler et al. (2000) point that

organizational politics are those activities that managers engage in to increase their power and use it to influence decision making so that organization pursues goals that favor their individual, functional, and divisional interests rather than organizational interest.

McShane and Von-Glinow (2000) defined organizational politics as “attempt to influence others using discretionary behaviors to promote personal objectives”. Political behavior are those “activities that are not required as part of one’s formal role in the organization, but that which influences, or attempt to influence, the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organizations” (Robbins et al. 2008). The researchers in their own intuitive knowledge defined organizational politics as manipulation of individual self-interest to achieve personal goal at the expense of organizational goal.

Pfeffer (1992) defined politics as “the processes, the actions, the behaviors through which potential power is utilized and realized. Another author (Dubrin, 2001) defined organizational politics as informal approaches to gaining power through means other than merit or luck. It could be argued that politics are used primarily to achieve power, either directly or indirectly, e.g., by being promoted, receiving a larger budget or other resources, or gaining desirable assignments.

### **Political Tactics for Increasing Power**

Apart from influence tactics, Schuler et al. (2000) have identified five different political tactics for increasing individual, group or functional in the following:

Tapping the source of functional and divisional power; recognizing who has power; controlling the agenda; bringing in an outside expert; and building coalitions and alliances.

Concerning tapping the source of functional and divisional power, the authors stress that managers or employees can use this tactics to make themselves irreplaceable by developing specialized skills such as knowledge of computer or special relationship with key customers that allow them solve problems in the organization.

Again, on recognizing who has the power, this strategy is usually applied by most top level managers who are conscious of rising above their position in the organization to identify with members of the board of directors, impress them and become loyal to them to get what they want.

The third factor on controlling the agenda is very common among those managers who devise means of becoming member of committee to influence decision making to suit their individual interest by preventing formal discussion of any issue they do not support by not putting the issue on the agenda (Schuler et al. 2000).

Finally, manager or subordinate can also build coalition with other managers or subordinates to increase power or position for the purpose of influencing decision making process in their favor. Most often, this usually involves trade of favor in return of favor. For example, manager A agrees to support manager B on an issue of interest important to manager B, and in return manager B supports manager A on an issue of interest important to manager A.

### **Factors Contributing to Political Behavior in Organizations**

It is useful to remember that in its original meaning, the idea of politics stems from the view that, where interests are divergent, society should provide a means of allowing individuals to reconcile their differences through consultation and negotiation. In ancient Greece, Aristotle advocated politics as a means of reconciling the need for unity in the Greek polis (city-state) with the fact that the polis was an "aggregate of many members." Politics, for him, provided a means of creating order out of diversity while avoiding forms of totalitarian rule. Political

science and many systems of government have built on this basic idea, advocating politics, and the recognition and interplay of competing interests that politics implies, as a means of creating a non-coercive form of social order. (Morgan, 1996)

Organizational politics are a natural result of the fact that people think differently and want to act differently. This diversity creates a tension that must be resolved through political means. There are many ways in which this can be done, for example: autocratically ("We'll do it this way"); bureaucratically ("We're supposed to do it this way"); technocratically ("It's best to do it this way"); or democratically ("How shall we do it?"). In each case the choice between alternative paths of action usually hinges on the power relations between the actors involved.

An organization's politics is most clearly manifest in the conflicts and power plays that sometimes occupy center stage, and in the countless interpersonal intrigues that provide diversions in the flow of organizational activity. Politics occurs on an ongoing basis, often in a way that is invisible to all but those directly involved. As Scottish sociologist Tom Burns has pointed out, most modern organizations promote various kinds of political behavior because they are designed as systems of simultaneous competition and collaboration. People must collaborate in pursuit of a common task, yet are often pitted against each other in competition for limited resources, status, and career advancement. These conflicting dimensions of organization are most clearly symbolized in the hierarchical organization chart, which is both a system of cooperation, in that it reflects a rational subdivision of tasks, and a career ladder up which people are motivated to climb. The fact that there are more jobs at the bottom than at the top means that competition for the top places is likely to be keen, and that in any career race there are likely to be far fewer winners than losers. Along with the fact that different individuals and groups are mandated to exercise authority and influence over others, the hierarchy more or less ensures the kinds of competitive struggle on which organizational politics thrives.

One does not have to be consciously cunning or deviously political to end up playing organizational politics. Political behavior is a fairly natural response to the tensions created between individuals and their organizations. The setting of budgets and work standards, the day-to-day supervision and control of work, as well as the pursuit of opportunity and career, are often characterized by sophisticated forms of gamesmanship. Take, for example, the situations that reveal the guile with which factory workers are able to control their pace of work and level of earnings, even when under the close eye of their supervisors or of efficiency experts trying to find ways of increasing productivity. The workers know that to maintain their positions they have to find ways of beating the system, and do so with great skill and ingenuity. Individuals who systematically wheel and deal their way through organizational affairs merely illustrate the most extreme and fully developed form of a latent tendency present in most aspects of organizational life.

The potential complexity of organizational politics is mindboggling, even before we take account of the personalities and personality clashes that usually bring roles and their conflicts to life. Sometimes the conflicts generated will be quite explicit and open for all to see, while at other times they will lie beneath the surface of day-to-day events. For example, relations in meetings may be governed by various hidden agendas of which even the participants are unaware. In some organizations disputes may have a long history, decisions and actions in the present being shaped by conflicts, grudges, or differences that others believe long forgotten or settled. The manager of a production department may align with the marketing manager to block a proposal from the production engineer not because he disagrees with the basic

ideas, but because of resentments associated with the fact that he and the production engineer have never gotten along. Though such resentments may seem petty, they are often powerful forces in organizational life.

A number of individual and organizational factors contribute to political behavior (adapted from Dubrin, 2001):

1. **Pyramid-shaped organization structure:** A pyramid concentrates power at the top. Only so much power is therefore available to distribute among the many people who would like more of it. Each successive layer on the organization chart has less power than the layer above. At the very bottom of the organization, workers have virtually no power. Since most organizations today have fewer layers than they previously had, the competition for power has become more intense.
2. **Subjective standards of performance:** People often resort to organizational politics because they do not believe that the organization has an objective and fair way of judging their performance and suitability for promotion. Similarly, when managers have no objective way of differentiating effective people from the less effective, they will resort to favoritism.
3. **Environmental uncertainty and turbulence:** When people operate in an unstable and unpredictable environment, they tend to behave politically. They rely on organizational politics to create a favorable impression because uncertainty makes it difficult to determine what they should really be accomplishing. The uncertainty, turbulence, and insecurity created by corporate mergers or downsizing is a major contributor to office politics.
4. **Emotional insecurity:** Some people resort to political maneuvers to ingratiate themselves with superiors because they lack confidence in their talents and skills.
5. **Manipulative tendencies:** Some people engage in political behavior because they want to manipulate others, sometimes for their own personal advantage.
6. **Disagreements that prevent rational decision making:** Many executives attempt to use rational criteria when making major decisions, but rational decision making is constrained by major disagreements over what the organization should be doing. Unless strategy and goals are shared strongly among key organizational members, political motivation is inevitable in organizational decision making.

### **Coping With Organizational Politics**

To keep organizational politics within reasonable bound, studies of Macgregor-Serven (2002) had suggested six measures in the followings; screen out exceedingly any political individuals at hiring time; create an open-book management system; make sure every employee knows how the business works and has a personal line of sight to key results with corresponding measurable objectives for individual accountability; have non-financial people interpret periodic financial and accounting statements for all employees; establish formal conflict resolution and grievance processes; and, publicly recognize and reward people who get real results without political games.

Although necessary, organizational politics can hurt an organization and its members when carried to excess. Too much politicking can result in lower morale, higher turnover, and wasted time and effort, thereby lowering performance. To avoid these negative consequences, leaders should combat political behavior when it is excessive and dysfunctional. Some steps have been identified by Culbert & McDonough, 1985; Dubrin, 2001, and Pettigrew (2003) that can help accomplish this follow.

1. To control politics, organizational leaders must be aware of its causes and techniques. For example, during a downsizing, the CEO can be on the alert for instances of back stabbing and transparent attempts to please him or her.
2. Open communication also can constrain the impact of political behavior. For instance, open communication can let everyone know the basis for allocating resources, thus reducing the amount of political behavior. When communication is open, it also makes it more difficult for some people to control information and pass along gossip as a political weapon.
3. Avoiding favoritism is a potent way of minimizing politics within a work group. If group members believe that getting the boss to like them is much less important than good job performance in obtaining rewards, they will try to impress the boss through task-related activities.
4. Setting good examples at the top of the organization can help reduce the frequency and intensity of organizational politics. When leaders are nonpolitical in their actions, they demonstrate in subtle ways that political behavior is not welcome. It may be helpful for the leader to announce during a staff meeting that devious political behavior is undesirable and unprofessional.
5. Another way of reducing the extent of political behavior is for individuals and the organization to have goal congruence, i.e., share the same goals, with thorough understanding of what they mean. If political behavior will interfere with the company and individuals achieving their goals, workers with goal congruence are less likely to play office politics excessively.
6. Politics can sometimes be constrained by a threat to discuss questionable information in a public forum. People who practice devious politics usually want to operate secretly and privately. They are willing to drop hints and innuendoes and make direct derogatory comments about someone else, provided they will not be identified as the source. An effective way of stopping the discrediting of others is to offer to discuss the topic publicly.

### **Organizational Politics and Performance**

Although, the level of political behavior varies from one person to another both in the organization, family, or society. For instance, a good political behavior is found in a case of Nelson Mandela of South Africa who is a political activist and influencer during his reign as South African president in maintaining peace and equity that benefited his home country. Frankly speaking, Mandela distinguished himself from predecessors by not taking advantage of his position at the expense of his countrymen for good legacies left behind for future generations to follow. This proves to be true for all Nelson Mandela's fans. Another good political behavior in an organization is found in a case of Kodak, a global photo firm in the USA. The firm experienced declining performance due to selfish interest of its past managers for failure to restructure the company during fierce threat of global competition with its rival firm. As mentioned earlier by George and Jones (2005); Robbins et al (2008) that good political behavior or tactic can help organization or individual to achieve its goal; while bad political tactics or behavior cannot help organization to achieve its goal, rather it instills fear, hatred, rancor among employees and breed unfriendly working environment which can low both employees performance and organization productivity at large.

On the short-comings arising from organizational politics, Miller, Rutherford and Kolodinsky (2008) put it that organizational politics cannot be eliminated and that managers should expect such outcome. The authors suggested that political maneuvering should be managed to keep it constructive and within reasonable bounds.

According to Culbert & McDonough, 1985; Dubrin, 2001, organizational politics can hurt an organization and its members when carried to excess. Too much politicking can result in lower morale, higher turnover, and wasted time and effort, thereby lowering performance.

Moreover, Kacmar and Ferris (1991) and Ferris and Kacmar (1992) argued that the higher the perceptions of politics are in the eyes of an organization member, the lower in that person's eyes is the level of justice, equity, and fairness. While these studies distinguished between politics and fairness, it became a consensus that these variables are strongly related. Thus, other studies (Ferris et al., 1996; Folger et al., 1992) have used the theory of procedural justice to argue that organizational politics is related to the leader-member exchange relationships as well as to the efficiency of human resource systems and to decision-making processes. Lack of minimal justice and fairness in these systems was found to be a major cause of higher perceptions of organizational politics and therefore of hampered organizational performance. Hence the following hypotheses are proposed:

1Ho: There is no significant relationship between organizational politics and achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

2Ho: there is no significant relationship between organizational politics and the harmony among the functional departments of an organization.

### **Methodology**

Survey research design was employed for the study, and the study sample comprised one hundred and fifty two (152) employees. This represented 30.1% of the total sample frame. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire, divided into two sections. Section A measured the bio data of respondents, while section B consists of questions used to solicit responses concerning the research work. The data used for this study was primary data generated through structured questionnaires. The questions in the questionnaires were close-ended questions. The response format employed a 5-Point Likert scale as follows: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree. The questionnaires were administered to the selected organizations used for the study. Survey documents delivered to the consenting organizations were accompanied by a cover letter in which the purpose of the study was outlined and the rights of participants were addressed. The selection was made using simple random sampling. The Simple Random Sampling method used in the selection of the sample for the study gave each worker in the target population an equal chance of being selected and was a sure way to reduce bias to the barest minimum. To derive useful meaning from the data, and examine the propositions of this study, data from the survey were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) as well as the following descriptive and inferential statistical techniques: Descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages and frequencies were employed in the study to measure demographic characteristics of respondents.

In order to test the hypotheses formulated, the researcher used correlation analysis to determine the direction and strength of the relationship that exists between the variables.

### **Results**

The demographic profile of respondents in Table 1 below reveals that majority of the respondents were males, constituting 63.8 percent of all the respondents. Respondents who were 30 but less than 60 years old make up 69 percent of the entire respondents. Those who were less than 30 years old constitute only 25.7 percent, while 60 years and above constitute an insignificant proportion (5.3 percent) of the entire respondents. Majority of the

respondents sampled were married and they constitute 75.6 percent, while 20.4 percent were single and 4.0 percent were divorced. Also, in terms of educational qualification, majority (38.8 percent) of them were bachelor’s degree or equivalent. Respondents who were holders of masters’ degree holders constitute 15.8 percent while those who had either OND or NCE make up 30.9 percent. Doctoral degree holders constitute the least (14.5 percent) of all the educational qualifications.

Table 1  
*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	97	63.8
	Female	55	36.2
	Total	152	100
Age	Less than 30 years	39	25.7
	30-40 years	51	33.5
	40-50 years	29	19.1
	50-60 years	25	16.4
	Over 60 years	8	5.3
	Total	152	100
Marital Status	Married	115	75.6
	Single	31	20.4
	Divorced	6	4.0
	Total	152	100
Educational qualification	OND/NCE	47	30.9
	HND/B.Sc	59	38.8
	M.Sc	24	15.8
	P.hd	22	14.5
	Total	152	100

Table 2  
*Correlation analysis of organization politics and achieving organizational goals and objectives.*

**Correlations**

		Organizational politics	Achieving goals and obj.
Org. Politics	Pearson correlation	1	-.224
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	152	152
Achieving Goals and obj.	Pearson Correlation	-.224	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	152	152

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2015

The table above shows the relationship that exists between organizational politics and achieving organization goals and objectives. The Pearson product-moment correlation



coefficient is -0.224. This shows that there is a weak negative relationship between organizational politics and achieving organization goals and objectives.

This relationship is found to be significant as the p-value 0.000 is less than 0.05

**DECISION:** Based on the above results, we accept the null hypothesis which states that organizational politics does not have a significant relationship with achieving organization goals and objectives.

Table 3

*Correlation analysis of organization politics and harmony among the functional departments of an organization.*

**Correlations**

		Organizational politics	Harmony
Org. Politics	Pearson correlation	1	-.469
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	152	152
Harmony	Pearson Correlation	-.469	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	152	152

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY, 2015

The table above shows the relationship that exists between organizational politics and achieving organization goals and objectives. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is -0.469. This shows that there is a moderate negative relationship between organizational politics and achieving harmony among the functional departments of an organization. This relationship is found to be significant as the p-value 0.000 is less than 0.05

**DECISION:** Based on the above results, we accept the null hypothesis which states that organizational politics does not have a significant relationship with achieving harmony among the functional departments of an organization.

**Conclusion**

The perception of political determinism is such that even when one obtains by merit, there is always the feeling that somebody somewhere must have facilitated it. It has been concluded that significance of politics having a negative effect on achieving organization goals and objectives. Organizational performance can be enhanced by providing them a working environment free of politics in their organizations. Working environment free of politics will not only help the employees to perform better and take decisions freely but it will also help the organizations to grow by achieving its goals and objectives efficiently and effectively. Implication of working environment free of politics in organizations will result in employees feeling their responsibilities towards their actions and placing themselves on the place of stakeholders to ensure for the benefits of all, the better employee’s performance as an outcome by utilizing all their powers. Also, interdependent harmony cannot be achieved with organizational politics. Here the chief executive should ensure that the management of functional areas should be devoid of politics. In conclusion, in as much as we cannot remove

politics in an organization, the management must use skills and competencies as a yardstick for decision making.

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