

The Relationship of Politics and Innovation through Job Embeddedness: Moderating Role of Inclusive Leadership

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Abstract

Purpose – Based on the conservation of resources theory, the current study intends to investigate the mediating role of organizational job embeddedness (OJE) in the relationship between the perception of organizational politics (POP) and innovative work behavior (IWB) as well as the moderating role of inclusive leadership (IL) between the perception of organizational politics and organizational job embeddedness.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a time-lagged, multi-source quantitative data collection method, 258 valid self-reported and supervisor-reported dyads were collected from diverse sectors in Pakistan. Data were analysed using SPSS-29 and PROCESS macro.

Findings – The results indicate that OJE mediates the negative relationship of POP with IWB. Moreover, IL is found to moderate the relationship between POP and OJE. The study also reveals that IL and OJE jointly demonstrate a moderated mediation role between POP and IWB. **Originality/value** – This study is the first to explore OJE as a mediator in the relationship between POP and IWB. Additionally, by examining the moderating role of IL, the study provides deeper insights into the dynamics between POP and IWB.

Keywords: Perception of Organizational Politics, Inclusive Leadership, Organizational Job Embeddedness Innovative Work Behavior

Introduction

Innovative work behavior (IWB) is the intentional development, introduction, and application of new ideas within a job role, group, or organization (Ghani et al., 2023). IWB is crucial for organizations to adapt and thrive in the rapidly evolving business landscape of today (Lin, 2023). By fostering IWB, organizations can stay competitive, drive growth, and create a sustainable competitive advantage (AlMulhim & Mohammed, 2023). Employees, as the primary agents of innovation, contribute an estimated 80% of novel concepts and proposals

in organizations (Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, organizations can unlock employee creativity by providing a conducive environment for IWB. Big companies like Google and 3M focus on cultivating innovation friendly culture, that encourages employees to exhibit innovative behavior (De Clercq et al., 2016).

As an extra-role behavior, IWB is not typically part of an employee's formal job description (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Being an extra-role behavior, IWB demands a significant amount of time and effort from the employees. Since it requires significant time and effort, employees are more likely to engage in IWB when their environment supports it. Organizations that promote a supportive culture, offer resources and incentives for innovation, and encourage risk-taking tend to see higher levels of IWB (Lin, 2023). Employees seek organizational support and high-involvement work practices that outweigh the personal costs of engaging in IWB (Alwali, 2023; Hadi et al., 2024). Additionally, when employees feel that their contributions are recognized and treated fairly, they are more inclined to participate in IWB (Akram et al., 2020).

Employees often assess the cost-benefit balance of engaging in IWB, opting to participate when the perceived benefits outweigh the efforts (Chen et al., 2022). However, assessing this balance can be challenging due to the uncertainty surrounding resource allocation and organizational support for innovation. The perception of organizational politics (POP), characterized by self-serving behavior, favoritism, and hidden agendas, creates uncertainty that can stifle innovation efforts by influencing resource allocation and decision-making processes (G. R. Ferris et al., 2000). While not always legitimate, such behaviors may deeply influence decisions related to resource allocation or rewards and punishment, often driven by cultural and contextual factors. Given the widespread presence of POP in organizations and the fact that employees base their behaviors on their perception of reality rather than objective reality (Arici et al., 2021), this study explores the impact of POP on IWB.

POP undermines employees' impression of equity and justice, resulting in negative consequences such as diminished job satisfaction and engagement (Mehmood et al., 2023; Murtaza et al., 2024). Employees experiencing elevated levels of POP frequently encounter increased stress and burnout, adversely impacting their performance (Arici et al., 2021). POP fosters an environment of distrust and fear, discouraging employees from taking risks or offering innovative ideas (Chen et al., 2022). Despite extensive research on the negative effects of POP, there is a notable gap in understanding how it specifically impacts IWB. This study fills the research gap by investigating the mediating role of OJE and the moderating IL, explaining a more comprehensive understanding of how POP affects innovation.

Drawing upon the theory of conservation of resources (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989), this study proposes that OJE serves as a critical mechanism linking POP to IWB. OJE refers to the totality of forces within the organization that compel employees to stay on the job (Mitchell et al., 2001). These forces, named Link, fit, and sacrifice, serve as resource abundance or resource scarcity. Current research postulates that if employees experience the detrimental effects of POP, they will deplete their valuable resources. Consequently, with limited resources, employees are less inclined to participate in extra-role behaviors such as IWB. This depletion of resources impairs their capacity to contribute to organizational innovation and creativity.

To mitigate the negative effects of POP, it is crucial to identify conditions that foster innovative behavior. Past research regard IL as a valuable resource in this context (Chen et al., 2020). IL is theorized to moderate the relationship between POP and OJE by replenishing the resources depleted due to the stress caused by organizational politics. Grounded in COR theory, the timely provision of resources can buffer against stress and restore employees' capacity to engage in extra-role behaviors like IWB. By providing essential cognitive, emotional, and psychological resources, IL helps employees counter the negative effects of POP, fostering OJE and sustaining innovative behavior.

The objectives of the present investigation are threefold. To examine the influence of POP on IWB. Secondly, the mediating influence of OJE, and thirdly the moderating influence of IL in alleviating the adverse effects of POP.

This study makes several important contributions to literature. First, it introduces OJE as a critical mechanism that explains how POP influences IWB, providing novel theoretical insights into the consequences of workplace politics. By highlighting OJE's mediating role in the POP-IWB relationship, the study expands the understanding of how workplace politics can undermine innovation. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study not only addresses the resource depletion caused by POP but also introduces inclusive leadership (IL) as a previously underexplored boundary condition for resource replenishment in politically charged environments. This contribution deepens the theoretical understanding of how resource management can mitigate the detrimental effects of organizational politics. Furthermore, the study identifies IL as a critical moderating factor, responding to calls in the literature to explore buffers that alleviate the negative consequences of POP (Ferris et al., 2019).

Literature Review

Perception of Organizational Politics and Innovative Work Behavior

While the extent of political behavior may vary across organizations, its presence is a universal reality (Abbas et al., 2014). Political climates are often characterized by powerful alliances, favoritism in hiring decisions, and the use of influence tactics by employees to achieve personal outcomes (Zivnuska et al., 2004). In highly political organizations, significant decisions often deviate from established structures and procedures, creating an environment of uncertainty (Li et al., 2020). Employees may adopt similar behaviors to avoid unfavorable (Vigoda-Gadot, Eran and Talmud, 2010). Although organizations typically view these behaviors as undesirable, they are often driven by the distribution of resources and rewards, which are shaped by various social and cultural factors (Arici et al., 2021). When employees observe these behaviors, they form perceptions based on their interpretation of the situation rather than objective facts (Breux et al., 2008). Perception of organizational politics (POP) refers to an individual's assessment of the extent to which colleagues and superiors engage in self-serving conduct within the workplace (Ferris et al., 2000).

Innovative work behavior (IWB) refers to employees' ability and willingness to generate, promote, and implement new ideas, processes, or products (Scott & Bruce, 1994). The literature on IWB, such as the work by Scott and Bruce (1994), often makes a clear distinction between innovation and creativity. Creativity involves generating original ideas, and IWB involves actively promoting and implementing those ideas to bring positive change

(Coetzer et al., 2018; Shalley et al., 2004). In other words, innovative work behavior goes beyond just generating creative ideas; it involves actively promoting and implementing those ideas to bring about positive change in the organization.

Except for a few jobs related to design, IWB is regarded as extra-role behavior (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Being extra-role behavior, IWB requires a tremendous amount of time and effort (He et al., 2021). Employees need ample resources to devote their energy and effort towards IWB. POP is considered a stressful environment and is linked to occupational stress and burnout (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Ferris et al., 1996). According to COR theory, employees under stress tend to protect their resources, making them less likely to invest in IWB (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). Moreover, if resources are acquired through illegitimate means, employees may reduce their engagement in positive work behaviors like IWB (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). Prior studies have also documented that the negative emotions linked to POP can jeopardize well-being and reduce employees' inclination to engage in discretionary behaviors like IWB (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017). Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Perception of organizational politics has a negative relationship with innovative work behavior.*

Perception of Organizational Politics and Organizational Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness refers to the totality of forces that encourage employees to remain in their current job or organization (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015). These forces include links, fit, and sacrifice along two dimensions of organizational and community job embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001). Links refer to all the social ties one has within the organization and community, including relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and other stakeholders (Ng & Feldman, 2014). Fit refers to the alignment of an individual's goals and values with those of the organization or community. Sacrifice refers to the perceived costs of leaving the organization, such as losing social connections or financial stability (William Lee et al., 2014). This study focuses on organizational job embeddedness (OJE) because prior research suggests that the significance of the factors of the current job and organization outweighs the influence of activities outside work when engaging in extra-role behavior (Coetzer et al., 2018). OJE has also been shown to better predict organizational outcomes than community job embeddedness (Lee et al., 2004).

COR theory consists of four fundamental principles. The first principle posits that the depletion of resources is comparatively more prominent than the acquisition of resources. The second principle proposes that individuals should allocate resources to manage resource depletion and acquire additional resources. The third principle asserts that when there is a decrease in resources, the significance of gaining resources becomes more comprehended. The fourth principle posits that individuals experiencing resource scarcity may exhibit aggressive or defensive behavior (Ampofo et al., 2022). These valuable resources include personal traits and psychological energy, as well as organizational resources like supervisor support and rewards (Mustamil & Najam, 2020). OJE comprises links, fit, and sacrifice, which are essential organizational resources (Liu et al., 2021). Employees who are more embedded develop stronger bonds with the organization, feel a sense of belonging, and aim to protect the organization's resources (Fuchs, 2022).

In high-POP environments, where self-serving behaviors manipulate organizational policies for personal gain, employees face stress, unhappiness, and unfairness (Hochwarter et al., 2020). This impacts perceptions of justice and equity in the workplace (Cho & Yang, 2018). In such a scenario, employees are more likely to preserve their resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Organizational politics can lead to employees engaging in competition for limited resources, frequently at the expense of others, which is likely to erode trust among them, leading to weak links with coworkers (Niamul et al., 2021). Because of the resource drain, employees may not have enough resources to invest in building links with coworkers. Instead, to effectively navigate and take advantage of the coalition-based distribution environment, employees may selectively establish connections with colleagues who only belong to the "good" group. This strategic networking enables them to flourish inside the organization (Liu et al., 2021). In this scenario, employees are unlikely to participate in numerous groups, resulting in a drop in links in the organization.

Social relationships have a direct impact on how well an individual is perceived to fit into the organization (Cooper-thomas & Wright, 2013). Links developed in the presence of POP are more likely to be of low quality, driven by self-serving interests, leading to disdain and distrust among employees, and reducing organizational fit (Liu et al., 2021).

In organizations with high POP, employees often face an imbalance between effort and rewards. Despite their diligence, they may be overlooked for promotions or incentives, leading to frustration and disengagement, as success seems driven by politics rather than merit (Li et al., 2020). Consequently, employees will only lose a few material or emotional resources if they decide to leave the organization. Put simply, employees make fewer sacrifices when they depart from such an organization (Liu et al., 2021). In a high-POP work environment, most individuals will have fewer links, fit, and sacrifice, indicating a lower resource pool (i.e., lower OJE). Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *Perception of organizational politics has a negative relationship with organizational job embeddedness.*

Organizational job Embeddedness and Innovative Work Behavior

OJE is not only a reliable indicator of employee retention but also leads to positive organizational outcomes. Previous studies indicate that job embeddedness leads to favorable organizational effects such as in-role performance and extra-role performance including innovative work behavior (Ferreira et al., 2017; Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012; Lee et al., 2004; Widiyanto et al., 2012; Zia et al., 2021). OJE is a source of resource abundance or scarcity (Wheeler et al., 2012). According to COR, if employees have ample resources at their disposal, they are more likely to engage in innovative work behavior.

OJE can also positively influence innovative behavior in three ways. Firstly, strongly embedded employees are more inclined to excel due to the positive sentiments they hold towards the organization (fit). When employees strongly align with their organizational culture and are appreciated by other members, they are more willing to offer new ideas and share those ideas more quickly with other employees (links) (Kwantes et al., 2007). Secondly, as employees grow more connected to organizational networks, they may feel a stronger sense of duty to meet or beyond the expectations of their colleagues and managers.

Moreover, high job embeddedness, stemming from extensive networks and strong connections among coworkers, could facilitate the rapid and smooth dissemination of innovation among deeply embedded employees (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Thirdly, highly embedded employees desire to succeed due to their intense motivation to retain their positions and secure the benefits linked to their current roles (sacrifice). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *Organizational job embeddedness has a positive relationship with innovative work behavior.*

Mediating Role of Organizational Job Embeddedness

Past studies have shown that OJE is a potential mediator between organizational climate and employee outcomes (Karatepe, 2013). Highly embedded workers are motivated to participate in innovation-related activities to protect their job security and ensure the success of their organization (Norouzinik et al., 2022). However, in the presence of POP, the trust between the employees erodes and they are less likely to feel embedded and contribute towards extra work behavior like IWB. According to COR, the stress caused by POP is likely to diminish employees' resources (OJE), and ultimately, employees may not have enough resources to indulge in innovative work behavior. Based on the above arguments, it is hypothesized that:

H4: *Organizational job embeddedness mediates the negative relationship between the perception of organizational politics and innovative work behavior.*

Moderating Role of Inclusive Leadership between Perception of Organizational Politics and Organizational Job Embeddedness

Inclusive leadership is a leadership approach characterized by being visible, accessible, and available in relationships with followers (Carmeli et al., 2010). IL prioritizes supporting employees as group members by assuring justice and equity, giving shared decision-making chances, and fostering varied contributions (Randel et al., 2018). IL involves leader behaviors that aim to help group members feel like they belong to the group (belongingness) while maintaining their individuality (uniqueness) and adding something new to group processes and outcomes. (Randel et al., 2018).

Research indicates that while POP often triggers negative consequences within organizations, IL can act as a buffer, mitigating these adverse effects by fostering a deep sense of belonging and trust—key elements in navigating politically charged environments (Landells & Albrecht, 2019). By invoking this trust, IL not only neutralizes the harmful impacts of POP but also sustains high levels of employee engagement and commitment (Su & Xie, 2023). IL provides professional knowledge, skills, and experience to guide and help employees adopt creative solutions to problems and gives them more room to use their talents (Chen et al., 2020). In addition, the inclusive leader attaches importance to employee participation and empowerment. This type of inclusive leadership behavior toward the employees facilitates organizational fit, an important factor of OJE (Javed et al., 2021).

According to COR, employees strive to safeguard, enhance, and sustain valuable resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In a stressful work environment where employees perceive organizational politics, IL provides valuable resources such as knowledge, time, and support, which are crucial for promoting OJE (ERKAL, 2023). The accessibility of inclusive leaders means

that employees can consult leaders at any time when they need them. It creates a sense of belongingness and organizational identification that are crucial for enhancing OJE (Bifan, 2023). Based on the above argument, it is hypothesized that

H5: *Inclusive leadership moderates the negative relationship of perception of organizational politics and organizational job embeddedness such that the relationship becomes weaker in the presence of inclusive leadership.*

Also, as argued earlier, the current study proposes OJE as a mediator in the relationship between POP and IWB. Based on H2 and H3 this study anticipates that IL can moderate the mediating effect of OJE in the relationship between POP and IWB. Specifically, the indirect impact of OJE on IWB will be higher when IL is higher. The current study formulates the following hypothesis.

H6: *Inclusive leadership moderates the indirect negative relationship of perception of politics with innovative work behavior via organizational job embeddedness such that the indirect negative relationship weakens in the presence of IL.*

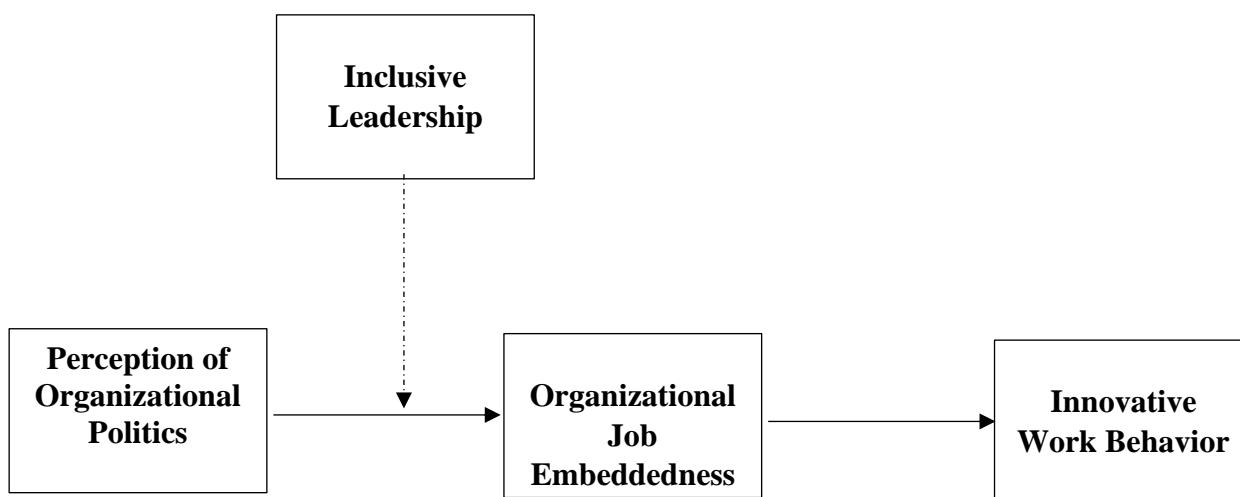


Figure 1. Framework of the study

Research Methods

Participants and Setting

Data Collection: A time-lagged, multi-source data collection method was employed, gathering information from employees across diverse sectors in Pakistan, including pharmaceuticals, education, and banking. Access to these organizations was facilitated through the authors' professional and personal networks. The data collection involved distributing paper-based questionnaires to two employees and one supervisor, with a three-week interval between each round. Employees were asked to provide their names to match the data across time points.

A three-week interval was used to mitigate common method and expectancy bias, as recommended by previous research (Dirk et al., 2021). Supervisor-rated performance assessments were incorporated to reduce self-reported bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). All surveys were administered in English, the official language of correspondence in professional settings and the medium of instruction in high schools and universities in Pakistan. Consequently, all questionnaire items were presented in English.

Cover letters assured participants of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their responses. Respondents were informed that only the research team would have access to the data and that no individual-level information would be disclosed publicly—only aggregated results would be shared. The letter emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and encouraged honest responses. Participants were also informed they could withdraw from the survey at any time.

At Time 1 (T1), data on POP and IL were collected, followed by OJE data at Time 2 (T2), three weeks after T1. Finally, supervisor-reported IWB data were collected at Time 3 (T3), three weeks after T2. A total of 390 questionnaires were distributed at T1, with 306 completed responses (78% response rate). Three weeks later, 276 responses were received for OJE at T2 (90% response rate). Supervisors were contacted to provide data on IWB at T3, with a final total of 258 completed supervisor responses, yielding a 93% response rate. After eliminating incomplete and unmatched responses, 258 valid self-reported and supervisor-reported dyads were obtained, resulting in an overall response rate of 66%. The respondents' average age was 32.2 years (SD = 9.8), with an average tenure of 7.5 years (SD = 7.3). Most respondents were male (males = 194; females = 64), and 98% had at least fourteen years of education.

Measures

Four instruments were used to assess the key constructs of POP, OJE, IL, and IWB. A five-point Likert-type scale was employed, where "5" indicated "strongly agree" and "1" indicated "strongly disagree."

Perception of Organizational Politics

POP was measured using a six-item scale developed by Hochwarter et al. (2003). An example item is: "There is a lot of self-serving behavior going on." The scale demonstrated Cronbach's alpha reliability of .87.

Organizational Job Embeddedness

OJE was measured using a nine-item scale developed by Felps et al. (2009). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. A sample item is: "I am a member of an effective work group." The Cronbach's alpha reliability of this measure was .89.

Inclusive Leadership

IL was measured using a nine-item scale developed by Carmeli et al. (2010). The measure employed a six-point Likert scale with anchors ranging from 1 = "strongly agree" to 5 = "strongly disagree." A sample item included: "The manager is open to hearing new ideas." The Cronbach's alpha reliability for this measure was .76.

Innovative Work Behavior

IWB was measured using a nine-item scale developed by Janssen (2000). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. A sample item is: "I am a member of an effective work group." Cronbach's alpha reliability for this measure was .93.

Data Analysis Procedure

This research employed IBM SPSS Statistics version 29.0.2.0 for data analysis. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measures. Harman's single-factor method was applied to assess common method bias. Descriptive and correlation analyses were performed using Pearson's correlation with SPSS. The moderation effect of IL on the relationship between POP and OJE was tested using simple slope tests in PROCESS macro model 1. This study investigated the impact of POP on IWB and the moderated mediating effects of IL and OJE using bootstrapping techniques with a resampling size of 5000 using MACRO processes Model 7 (Hayes, 2013).

Reliability and Validity of Scales

The analysis of the constructs reveals adequate reliability and convergent validity for all variables. POP demonstrated a composite reliability (CR) of .919 and an average variance extracted (AVE) of .655, with factor loadings ranging from .709 to .912. IL exhibited a CR of .937 and an AVE of .602, with loadings between .702 and .886. OJE showed a CR of .923 and an AVE of .573, with factor loadings between .705 and .844. Lastly, IWB had a CR of .943 and an AVE of .651, with factor loadings ranging from .713 to .922. These results indicate strong internal consistency across all scales. Table 1 shows the scale's reliability and validity values.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The model comparison results shown in Table 2 provide evidence for the distinctiveness of the four constructs (POP, OJE, IWB, and IL). The baseline four-factor model showed a good fit to the data, with $\chi^2(521) = 986.173$, $\chi^2/df = 1.892$, TLI = .951, CFI = .954, and RMSEA = .051. This model significantly outperformed the alternative models. The 3-factor model, which combined POP, OJE, and IWB, resulted in a worse fit, $\chi^2(524) = 1436.806$, with a significant change in chi-square ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 450.633$, $p < .001$), and higher RMSEA = .075, indicating a poorer fit. The 2-factor model, which combined OJE and IL, was also a poorer fit, $\chi^2(526) = 1961.832$, $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 975.659$, with a TLI = .823 and RMSEA = .097. Finally, the 1-factor model had the worst fit, $\chi^2(527) = 2507.083$, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 1520.91$, with a TLI = .694 and RMSEA = .104. These results confirm that the four-factor model best represents the data, demonstrating the distinctiveness of POP, OJE, IWB as shown in table 2.

Table 1

Scale's reliability and validity

Studied variables	Coding	λ	CRs	AVE
Perception of Organizational Politics			.919	.655
There is a lot of self-serving behavior going on.	POP1	.709		
People do what is best for them, not what is best for the organization.	POP2	.773		
People spend too much time sucking up to those who can help them.	POP3	.912		
People are working behind the scenes to ensure that they get their piece of the pie.	POP4	.852		
Many employees are trying to maneuver their way into the in group.	POP5	.769		
Individuals are stabbing each other in the back to look good in front of others.	POP6	.823		
Inclusive Leadership			.937	.602
The manager is open to hearing new ideas (Openness)	IL1	.716		
The manager is attentive to new opportunities to improve work processes (Openness)	IL2	.743		
The manager is open to discuss the desired goals and new ways to achieve them (Openness)	IL3	.749		
The manager is available for consultation on problems (availability)	IL4	.863		
The manager is an ongoing 'presence' in this team-someone who is readily available.	IL5	.815		
(availability).	IL6	.886		
The manager is available for professional questions I would like to consult with him/her (availability)	IL7	.702		
The manager is ready to listen to my requests (availability)	IL8	.737		
The manager encourages me to access him/her on emerging issues (accessibility)	IL9	.719		
The manager is accessible for discussing emerging problems (accessibility)	IL10	.801		
Organizational Job Embeddedness			.923	.573
I am a member of an effective work group.	OJE1	.705		
I work closely with my coworkers.	OJE2	.808		
On the job, I interact frequently with my work group members.	OJE3	.717		
My job utilizes my skills and talents well.	OJE4	.746		
I feel like I am a good match for my organization.	OJE5	.718		
If I stay with my organization, I will be able to achieve most of my goals.	OJE6	.773		
I have a lot of freedom in this job to pursue my goals.	OJE7	.751		
I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job.	OJE8	.736		
I believe the prospects for continuing employment with my organization are excellent.	OJE9	.844		
Innovative Work Behavior			.943	.651
Creating new ideas for difficult issues (idea generation).	IWB1	.922		
Searching out new working methods, techniques, or instruments (idea generation).	IWB2	.736		
Generating original solutions for problems (idea generation).	IWB3	.729		
Mobilizing support for innovative ideas (idea promotion).	IWB4	.771		
Acquiring approval for innovative ideas (idea promotion).	IWB5	.795		

Studied variables	Coding	λ	CRs	AVE
Making important organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas (idea promotion).	IWB6	.895		
Transforming innovative ideas into useful applications (idea realization).	IWB7	.713		
Introducing innovative ideas into the work environment in a systematic way (idea realization).	IWB8	.826		
Evaluating the utility of innovative ideas (idea realization).	IWB9	.847		

Notes: " λ " = Factor loading

Table 2

Results of confirmatory factor analyses

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Baseline model (4-factor model)	986.173	521	1.892		.951	.954	.051
3-factor model: combining POP, OJE, and IWB	1436.806	524	2.741	450.633 (3)	.914	.928	.075
2-factor model: combining OJE and IL	1961.832	526	3.729	975.659 (5)	.823	.884	.097
1-factor model	2507.083	527	4.757	1520.91 (6)	.694	.705	.104

Notes: POP = perception of organizational politics, OJE = organizational job embeddedness, IWB = innovative work behavior, IL = inclusive leadership

Analysis and Results

Correlation Analysis

Table 3. shows the results of the correlation matrix. The descriptive statistics and reliability analysis for the constructs indicate strong internal consistency across all variables, with Cronbach's alpha (α) values ranging from .897 to .940, which exceed the commonly accepted threshold of .70. The mean scores for IWB, OJE, IL, and POP were 4.115 (SD = 1.091), 4.021 (SD = .973), 3.883 (SD = .894), and 2.121 (SD = .561), respectively. The square roots of the AVE for each construct (shown in parentheses) demonstrate good convergent validity, as they are higher than the inter-construct correlations. Correlations show that IWB is positively related to OJE ($r = .316$, $p < .001$) and IL ($r = .201$, $p < .01$) but negatively related to POP ($r = -.196$, $p < .01$). Similarly, OJE is positively correlated with IL ($r = .327$, $p < .001$) and negatively correlated with POP ($r = -.258$, $p < .001$). Lastly, IL is negatively correlated with POP ($r = -.291$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that IWB is more strongly associated with OJE and IL, while POP has a negative relationship with IWB, OJE, and IL.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 4 shows the hypothesis testing results that demonstrate significant direct and moderating effects. For H1, POP has a significant negative direct effect on IWB ($\beta = -.215$, $p < .010$), with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of $[-.2749, -.1542]$, indicating that higher levels of POP are associated with lower levels of IWB. In H2, POP has a strong negative effect on OJE ($\beta = -.489$, $p < .001$), with a 95% CI of $[-.5381, -.4378]$. H3 supports that OJE positively influences IWB ($\beta = .316$, $p < .001$), with a 95% CI of $[.2805, .3741]$.

Furthermore, the moderating effect (H5) reveals that IL significantly moderates the relationship between POP and OJE ($\beta = -.154, p < .050$), with a 95% CI of $[-.2013, -.1163]$, suggesting that IL weakens the negative effect of POP on OJE. These results provide strong support for the hypothesized relationships between POP, OJE, IWB, and the moderating role of IL.

Table 3
Correlation matrix

Constructs	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. IWB	4.115	1.091	.940	(.806)						
2. OJE	4.021	.973	.919	.316	(.756)					
3. IL	3.883	.894	.935	.201	.327	(.775)				
4. POP	2.121	.561	.897	-.196	-.258	-.291	(.809)			
5. Age	35.667	8.656	-	.035	.045	.066	.0701			
6. Gender (1 = female)	.233	.405	-	.044	.071	0.689	.059	.0499		
7. Education (1 = masters)	.344	.489	-	.008	.077	.0376	.039	.078	.073	

Notes: Square roots of AVE in parentheses; Cronbach alpha = α ; N = 305; Notes: POP = perception of organizational politics, OJE = organizational job embeddedness, IWB = innovative work behavior, IL = inclusive leadership

Table 4
Hypotheses results

Hypotheses	Unstandardized estimates (β)	95% CI		S.E.	P value
		LLCI	ULCI		
Direct effect					
H1: POP \rightarrow IWB	-.215	-.2749	-.1542	.027	< .010
H2: POP \rightarrow OJE	-.489	-.5381	-.4378	.041	< .001
H3: OJE \rightarrow IWB	.316	.2805	.3741	.049	< .001
Moderating Effect					
H5: POP * IL \rightarrow JOE	-.154	-.2013	-.1163	.024	< .050

Notes: POP = perception of organizational politics, OJE = organizational job embeddedness, IWB = innovative work behavior, IL = inclusive leadership

The mediation analysis results for H4 confirm the significant indirect effect of POP on IWB through OJE. The effect of POP on OJE (path a) is significant and negative ($\beta = -.4892, p < .01$), while the effect of OJE on IWB (path b) is positive and significant ($\beta = .3165, p < .01$). The indirect effect of POP on IWB via OJE ($a \times b$) is negative and significant ($\beta = -.1548$), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from $-.2084$ to $-.1172$. Since the confidence interval does not

include zero, the mediation effect is supported, indicating that OJE mediates the relationship between POP and IWB. Table 5 shows the mediating effect of OJE.

Table 5

Bootstrap analysis of mediating effect

IV	MV	DV	Effect of IV on M (a)	Effect of M on DV (b)	Indirect effect (a×b)	95 % CI (LL, UL)	Supported
H4: POP → OJE → IWB							
POP	OJE	IWB	-.4892	.3165	-.1548	(-.2084, -.1172)	Yes

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; POP = perception of organizational politics, OJE = organizational job embeddedness, IWB = innovative work behavior

The results indicate both direct and indirect effects of POP on IWB, as well as the conditional indirect effects moderated by IL. The direct effect of POP on IWB is negative and significant ($\beta = -.2152$, $SE = .027$, 95% CI [-.2749, -.1542]). The indirect effect of POP on IWB through OJE is also significant ($\beta = -.1548$, $SE = .036$, 95% CI [-.2084, -.1172]), indicating a mediating effect of OJE.

The moderated mediated effects of POP on IWB at different levels of IL further reveal that when IL is low (-1 SD), the indirect effect is stronger ($\beta = -.1704$, $SE = .045$, 95% CI [-.2103, -.1277]), compared to when IL is high (+1 SD), where the indirect effect weakens ($\beta = -.1173$, $SE = .051$, 95% CI [-.1885, -.0374]). This suggests that higher levels of IL mitigate the negative impact of POP on IWB through OJE as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Moderated-mediation results for conditional indirect effects at the values of moderators

	β	SE	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Direct effect of POP on IWB	-	.027	-	-.1542
	.2152		.2749	
Indirect effect of POP on IWB via OJE	-	.036	-	-.1172
	.1548		.2084	
Conditional indirect effect of POP on IWB at values of IL				
-1 SD low level of IL	-	.045	-	-.1277
	.1704		.2103	
+1 SD high level of IL	-	.051	-	-.0374
	.1173		.1885	

Note: CI = Confidence Interval, UL= Upper limit, LL= Lower limit, SE= Standard error, POP = perception of organizational politics, OJE = organizational job embeddedness, IWB = innovative work behavior, IL = inclusive leadership

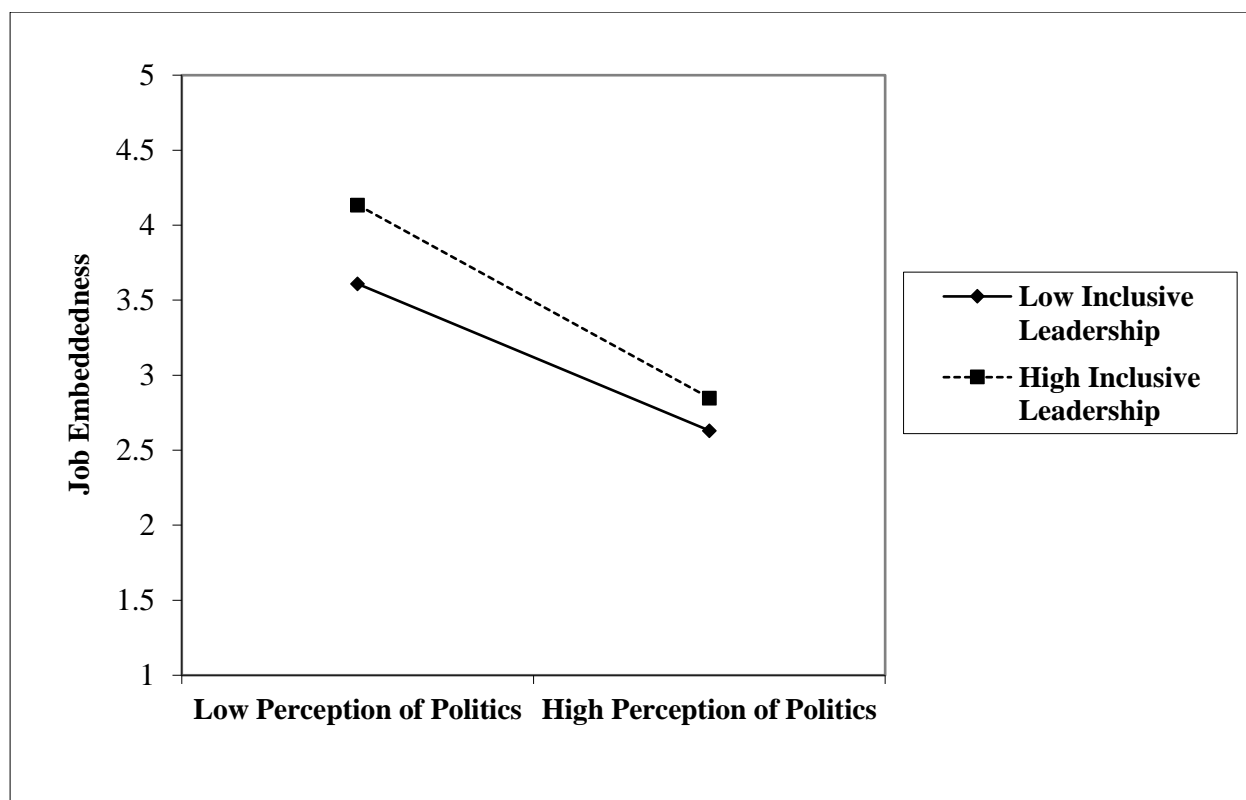


Figure 2. Interactive effect of perception of politics and inclusive leadership on job embeddedness.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The present study explored how the perception of organizational politics (POP) impacts innovative work behavior (IWB), with a particular focus on the mediating role of organizational job embeddedness (OJE) and the moderating effect of inclusive leadership (IL). The findings contribute valuable insights into the negative impact of POP on innovation and organizational dynamics. These results not only confirm earlier research but also offer new

perspectives on how leadership and embeddedness can mitigate the detrimental effects of politics within the workplace.

The results reaffirm the negative relationship between POP and IWB, consistent with previous research (Chen et al., 2022). Organizational politics undermines employees' capacity to engage in innovative work by fostering self-serving behaviors, favoritism, and hidden agendas. Such an environment creates a sense of uncertainty and unfairness, which discourages employees from going beyond their formal job responsibilities. As Zhang et al., (2019) highlighted, employees who perceive biased treatment or neglect are likely to experience a diminished sense of self-worth, which shifts their focus away from discretionary efforts like innovation. This study reinforces the notion that POP erodes the social and emotional resources employees need to invest in creative and innovative processes.

A key contribution of this research is the demonstration that OJE mediates the relationship between POP and IWB. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the findings show that employees in politically charged environments are inclined to conserve their resources, focusing on self-preservation rather than engaging in extra-role behaviors like IWB. OJE, which encompasses the links, fit, and sacrifices that tie employees to their organization, plays a crucial role in supporting innovative behaviors. However, when POP is high, employees' sense of embeddedness weakens, reducing the social and psychological resources necessary to engage in innovation. This result emphasizes the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive organizational environment to strengthen OJE and, in turn, promote innovation. By enhancing employees' sense of belonging, alignment with organizational goals, and perceived value of their work, organizations can help mitigate the resource depletion caused by POP and encourage IWB.

The study also underscores the moderating role of IL in the relationship between POP and OJE. Inclusive leadership emerged as a critical factor in buffering the negative impact of POP. Leaders who practice inclusivity by being accessible, supportive, and open to employees' contributions provide essential cognitive and emotional resources that help counteract the resource losses associated with POP. As previous research suggests, IL fosters psychological safety and a sense of belonging, which are particularly valuable in environments where political behaviors erode trust and cooperation (Chen et al., 2020). The findings indicate that IL not only compensates for the harmful effects of POP but also empowers employees to maintain their embeddedness and continue contributing to the organization's innovative potential. This suggests that organizations can enhance resilience against the damaging effects of POP by cultivating inclusive leadership practices.

Research Implications

This study has shed light on the mechanism by which POP influences employee performance through OJE. POP leads to several negative psychological outcomes, including low self-esteem, depressed mood, and diminished emotional well-being. Our findings suggest that POP directly impacts performance and is a key factor in reduced performance as a result of weakened OJE. Employees whose social needs are met tend to perform better, whereas feelings of rejection and perceived isolation result in negative effects such as lower OJE. When employees experience ostracism at work and lack social support, they become emotionally drained. This exhaustion leads them to perceive themselves as unworthy in the workplace,

which decreases their motivation and performance. However, employees with strong IL are better equipped to counteract the negative effects of POP and maintain their performance levels.

Identifying the factors that contribute to adverse outcomes and poor performance allows organizations to better understand the root causes of these issues. This knowledge helps managers take appropriate action to address problems effectively. A culture of ostracism within organizations fosters a lack of hospitality among employees, which diminishes their performance and negatively impacts the organization's overall performance. Addressing such issues requires early intervention by managers. They must create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their concerns, including personal matters that may affect their work (DeClercq et al., 2018b). Organizations should also encourage the formation of larger working groups instead of smaller ones, as greater social support and healthy competition can enhance employee motivation. Additionally, equipping employees with the opportunity to develop IL as a resource will help them better handle POP when it arises. Lastly, to foster a healthy organizational climate that promotes personal development, complaints of ostracism must not be ignored. Instead, they should be addressed thoroughly and with care.

Finally, the findings confirm the moderating role of IL on the relationship of POP on OJE. In the presence of inclusive leadership, the negative effect of POP on OJE weakens. Consistent with the previous research findings, IL emerges as the source of desirable resources required to counter the resource loss caused by POP. IL can potentially reinforce or compensate for the resources needed by the employees when faced with POP to embed on the job which ultimately affects IWB.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations were identified during the course of this study. First, although we used a time-lagged design, our model was not purely longitudinal, which may raise concerns about establishing causality. While the strong results provide confidence in our findings, future research employing fully longitudinal models would offer greater support for our conclusions. To further address the issue of causality, we recommend the use of experimental research designs, as suggested by Chambliss & Schutt, (2006).

Another limitation concerns the simultaneous measurement of POP and IL at Time 1 (T1) through self-reports, which could potentially introduce multicollinearity. Despite this, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated good discriminant validity between the two constructs. Moreover, multicollinearity typically works against detecting significant moderator effects, as it suppresses the ability to find interaction effects. The fact that we observed significant interaction effects between POP and IL on both OJE and IWB through OJE suggests that the issue of multicollinearity did not adversely impact the results.

Future research should build on these findings by testing fully longitudinal models to further validate the proposed relationships. Additionally, cross-cultural studies would be valuable to determine whether individuals from different cultural backgrounds respond differently to mistreatment in the workplace. It is plausible that individuals from collectivistic cultures with high power distance may exhibit more restrained reactions to mistreatment

compared to those from more egalitarian, low power distance cultures. Exploring other potential moderators, such as personality traits (e.g., the Big Five or Dark Triad), could also provide additional insights for future research and help uncover further nuances in how POP and IL influence organizational outcomes.

Conclusion

This study explored the impact of POP on IWB by investigating the mediating role of OJE and the moderating role of IL. The findings reveal that POP negatively affects both OJE and IWB, as it undermines employees' sense of belonging and self-worth within the organization, leaving them emotionally drained and less capable of embedding within their jobs. The results confirmed that OJE plays a mediating role in this relationship, while IL acts as a crucial moderator. Employees with higher levels of IL were better able to cope with the adverse effects of POP, as IL effectively substitutes the resource loss that typically accompanies exposure to organizational politics.

The implications of these findings suggest that organizations should work to create a healthy work environment by minimizing the presence of politics and fostering inclusive leadership among their managers and leaders. Encouraging inclusive leadership can equip organizational leaders with the tools necessary to counteract the negative effects of POP and, in turn, promote greater job embeddedness and innovation among employees. By investing in both organizational culture and leadership development, organizations can better manage the challenges posed by workplace politics and create conditions that support innovation and employee well-being.

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