

Exploring the Impact of Office Politics on Employee Engagement and Organizational Commitment

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ABSTRACT

Office politics is part of organizational behavior. However, it has only been lightly addressed in recent literature. Today, office politics adopts a negative notion, which causes some individuals to believe that it is possible to avoid office politics. However, the fact that office politics affect even those not involved means that it is in everyone's interest to address the problem and develop practical solutions. Few studies have linked politics to other concepts, including organizational commitment and employee engagement. This research has filled this gap by examining the impacts of office politics on organizational commitment and employee engagement. The findings lead to the conclusion that office politics are often associated with negative organizational outcomes associated with commitment and engagement. Higher levels of Positive office politics reduce engagement and commitment. Even though there are instances of positive outcomes, such rare instances may be caused by contextual and mediating factors, including job meaningfulness and personality.

Keywords- office politics, positive office politics, organizational commitment, employee engagement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Politics is part of the everyday life of human beings. Many believe politics is unavoidable and not always bad (Aransyah & Hetami, 2021). Politics are often controversial in the workplace as many people attempt to exert power over others. Responses to such attempts are not always positive. In some cases, individuals prefer to avoid office politics by remaining neutral.

However, some individuals with lived experiences of workplace politics insist that politics are not something one can just sit out (Postma, 2021). Even with the potential to ruin one's career, office politics remain a force to be reckoned with in the workplace. Therefore, some people propose that it is wiser for one to use office politics to one's advantage (Postma, 2021). The main point is that workplace politics could be detrimental

to workers, but they also have the potential to further their individual interests.

While some people believe in the possibility of turning office politics to one's advantage, the dominant school of thought is that workplace politics affect employee productivity, job satisfaction, engagement, commitment, and other aspects that affect performance levels.

Employee engagement and commitment are major themes in studies on the management of human resources and organizational behavior. Some studies have established that corporate politics cause damaging effects on such outcomes as burnout, stress, job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions (Landells & Albrecht, 2019). The rationale is that organizational politics entails human relationships and the exercise of power. According to (Adams et al., 2021), the general

political behavior in an organization may involve influencing others and events to meet personal goals, advance organizational goals, or protect selfish interests. Such political behaviors most likely cause a clash of interests, which affects how employees relate and engage with each other and their employers. A perfect example is presented by Postma (2021), who relates to having been fired under the guise of budget cuts. In reality, there was someone in authority who wanted this employee gone.

The above example illustrates that office politics are inescapable, even when one does not want to engage in them. Selfish leaders can pursue their interests at the expense of employees, even those not actively involved in politics. Therefore, many employees are forced to become involved in politics for the sake of their interests. Employees who dedicate too much time to office politics spend less time in constructive employment engagements (Aransyah & Hetami, 2021). Therefore, even the organization suffers the detriments of negative corporate politics.

Employee engagement and commitment are aspects crucial to employee performance. Employee engagement entails the degree to which workers are involved in corporate activities, including decision-making. Commitment manifests through the length of service. Engaged workers are more hardworking and loyal to the company (Aziez, 2022). Therefore, employers who desire to have highly productive workers will ensure that they engage them and implement all measures necessary to boost commitment. Turnover translates into high costs of hiring and loss of talent. According to Hall (2019), a 2017 estimate indicated that turnover could cost employers up to 33% of an employee's annual salary. From a management perspective, employee commitment is desirable due to such costs.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Office politics has often attracted negative light from various quarters, often labeling it dangerous for employers and employees. However, many scholars agree that organizational behaviors are habitually political, thus, unavoidable in reality (Bashir et al., 2019). This means that organizational leaders must acknowledge this fact and undertake to ensure that the nature of politics does not endanger the well-being of the company and its employees. Employers are concerned about the output of their employees. Human capital is critical to the success of a business. Therefore, it can be expected that firms tend to implement the necessary measures to create an environment that supports performance. In this case, engagement and commitment are two aspects that must be managed carefully to ensure organizational success.

The available research on the links between office politics, engagement, and commitment is scant. However, it is important to acknowledge that some scholars have tried to draw links between office politics and engagement and office politics and employee

commitment. For example, Landells and Albrecht (2019) examine engagement as one of the main outcomes of organizational politics, alongside stress and work meaningfulness. These scholars establish that politics reduce engagement. Links between corporate politics and organizational commitment have been explored by Adams et al. (2021), who establish that politics diminish job satisfaction and employee commitment. These are only a few examples of cases where the research has discussed the topic. Current efforts separate engagement and commitment and examine them differently. There is a need to produce updated research on the effect of office politics on engagement and commitment.

III. RESEARCH PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

This research aims to explore the impact of office politics on employee engagement and organizational commitment. To achieve this purpose, the research examines the relationship between office politics and workplace dynamics, specifically interpersonal relationships and group and individual behaviors. The research also examines factors that contribute to the prevalence of office politics. After all these aspects have been effectively examined, the research will generate recommendations for organizational leaders on managing office politics best to avoid detrimental effects on employees and the organization itself. In other words, the research emphasizes the importance of employee engagement and organizational commitment and explains why office politics should never be allowed to undermine these aspects.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the key factors affecting the prevalence of office politics?
- How does office politics affect employee engagement?
- How does office politics affect organizational commitment?
- What are the best practices in managing office politics to avoid detrimental effects on engagement and commitment?

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study emanates from the need to debunk various issues surrounding office politics to ensure that organizations and employees can survive the underlying detriments. The negative light in which office politics is depicted prevents many employees from constructively engaging in corporate politics. However, since office politics is an inalienable aspect of organizational behavior and culture, it focuses on helping

employees embrace it. This research is a first step in that direction in that it is designed to offer a clear understanding of office politics and recommend to employers and employees how to make office politics a positive aspect of the modern workplace.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this literature review is to present an understanding of the concept of office politics, from definition to theoretical development and conceptualization. The review will also highlight recent scholarly developments regarding office politics, its causes, manifestation in real life, importance, and consequences for organizations. Research gaps found in past studies will also be highlighted and rationalized to make a good case for the current research effort.

VII. DEFINING OFFICE POLITICS

Office politics is a concept with many synonyms, including organizational politics and workplace politics. Many scholars acknowledge that even though people can recognize office politics, they often find it difficult to define it (Olorunleke, 2015). According to Atta and Khan (2016), office politics entails acts of influence by employees to protect or enhance individual or group interests. The political systems within the workplace can be defined as informal systems where individuals use connections and networks to obtain desired results (Thomas et al., 2020). This definition explains why many people have a negative perception of corporate politics. The rationale is that the political behaviors of some individuals are entirely selfish, and the desired results often imply one's interests above or at the expense interests of others. In many cases, politics comprise deceitful behavior displayed by employees toward the workplace environment for individual interests, which may not be aligned with the group and corporate objectives (Olusegun, 2019). In such cases, organizational politics become detrimental to corporate success. Corporate politics are a core and inalienable part of organizational behavior.

Organizations comprise people managing and coordinating other resources to achieve set objectives within a complex and often unstable environment (Olorunleke, 2015). Organizations often fail to live up to their expectations regarding objectivity and rationality. The result is that political behaviors become commonplace. Such behaviors lead to another definition of corporate politics as social influence processes that benefit the organization or self-serving behaviors that go against corporate goals (Olorunleke, 2015). However, the most common theme in the attempts to define organizational politics is the individual actions directed toward further self-interests without any regard for the well-being of other people within the organization (Park & Lee, 2020; Malik et al., 2019). Considering the broad

nature of organizational behavior, some scholars believe that office politics represent behaviors outside the organizational norms and cultures (Imran et al., 2018). Even though some scholars acknowledge that organizational politics can be either good or bad, those offering definitions mostly give it a negative connotation involving the selfish tendencies of employees in the pursuit of desired outcomes.

Some scholars have introduced the concept of perceived organizational politics (POP) and explored how it manifests in the workplace. Malik et al. (2019) define POP as individual behaviors designed for self-serving intent by coworkers and supervisors. Therefore, it can be observed that POP has a similar definition to the concept of office politics in that the basic tenet in both definitions is the self-serving behaviors of organizational members (Atta & Khan, 2016). Additionally, POP is considered office politics viewed from the employees' point of view, which always takes a negative form (Atta & Khan, 2016). POP manifests through three main schemes:

go-along-to-get-ahead (GATGA), general political behavior (GPB), and pay and promotion policies (PPP).

In PPP, pay and promotions are done either on the basis of merit or other political aspect of the reward structure. Politically, pay and promotions arise from favoritism or other political affiliation. In GATGA, employees believe that remaining and taking no action saves valuable outcomes. This is based on the belief that non-threatening silent people are rewarded for their non-interference with the actions of powerful people. In GPB, general politics manifests through people blaming others for mistakes, taking another's credit, or following a more powerful individual. There are no actual rules of engagement in POP, but it manifests when people strive to control scarce organizational resources.

Positive office politics

Very few scholars have offered to define and consider positive organizational politics. As highlighted earlier, many researchers adopt the negative notion of the concept and ignore the possibility that corporate politics could have positive implications for the workplace. Butler et al. (2019) define positive organizational politics as the use of social capital in an organization to create favorable outcomes in the workplace. From a grounded theory perspective, political actions are either negative or positive depending on the breadth of the beneficiaries. In other words, positive outcomes should be enjoyed in a broad context or by a larger group rather than the political actor alone or a small group to which the actor is a member (Butler et al., 2019).

This definition implies that organizational members can use office politics to achieve positive outcomes. According to Cacciattolo (2015), different personalities mediate positive or negative political outcomes in the workplace. In this case, positive

workplace politics are a basis for competitive advantage and fostering trust among members. However, this requires that corporate members be politically skilled and that the leaders have proper management skills to manage corporate politics effectively.

Effects of office politics

Research on the effects of office politics has not been organized in any discernible form.

As such, this area comprises a broad spectrum of topics ranging from negative and positive consequences of office politics to studies on how office politics affect specific aspects of an organization. Just like in the definition, the research on the effects of office politics often takes a negative tone, depicting the practice as entirely detrimental to the well-being of an organization. For example, office politics is seen as having a negative impact on the achievement of corporate goals and the achievement of harmony among the functional departments of a firm (Olorunleke, 2015). The results of such findings force many scholars to conclude that the best solution is to provide a workplace environment free of politics (Olorunleke, 2015). Regression analysis in a study by Atta and Khan (2016) established that POP was a negative indicator of organizational citizenship behavior, affective commitment, and job involvement. These findings are based on the social exchange theory, which implies that employees tend to reciprocate what they perceive in their organizations. In other words, when workers perceive the firm as positive and favoring, they respond favorably. This raises the question of whether employees would positively respond to perceived positive politics.

The above question can be answered by considering the arguments by Olusegun (2019) on organizational development. Organizational development is another aspect affected by office politics. The essence of 'organization' is to foster corporate unity where all workers operate with consistent strategies to achieve corporate goals. Whether private or public, for-profit or non-profit, an organization focuses on competitiveness in customer service or patronage (Olusegun, 2019). This researcher admitted that organizational politics can have positive implications on organizational development, including efficient decision-making, quality leadership, addressing conflicts, and an effective means of grapevine. However, politics can affect this process by preventing harmony among organizational members. In this case, the negative effects of workplace politics include defective leadership, conflict, poor management, job dissatisfaction, enhanced mediocrity, lack of trust, and hatred (Olusegun, 2019). Therefore, office politics can have positive implications for an organization, but it depends on how organizational members perceive and use politics.

When employees perceive office politics, they develop negative responses. Such responses reflect through their relationship with the firm, including the desire to continue being part of an organization. In this

case, scholars establish that employees' perceived political behavior in the workplace indicates turnover intention (Mostafa et al., 2022). In other words, perceived office politics are associated with job dissatisfaction, a key mediating factor in turnover. Studies on the link between POP and employee turnover seem to agree that negative office politics lead to high turnover and intentions to leave the firm (Agina & Abdelhakim, 2021; Gupta et al., 2021). The rationale is that such office politics manifest through unequal power structures, favoritism, and negative GBP. In all cases, employees are likely to be negatively affected by office politics, hence their turnover intention. In other cases, negative politics prevent employees from expressing concerns, suggestions, and sharing information (Cao & Zhou, 2021). This means that negative politics hinder employees' voices in an organization.

Overall, it can be observed that many studies associate office politics with negative organizational outcomes. Besides turnover, many scholars establish a negative relationship between office politics and job satisfaction, performance, citizenship behavior, commitment, and employees' voice.

Dealing with office politics

Even though many studies seem to outline the negative aspects of office politics, they have failed to offer any meaningful insights regarding the best interventions or solutions to the problem. However, a few of the studies adopting a negative notion of office politics seem to suggest that the negative outcomes of office politics can be resolved by ensuring that the workplace is devoid of politics (Olorunleke, 2015). However, it can be argued that such a recommendation seems impractical based on the observation that politics are an inalienable part of an organization. As such, it would be more prudent to consider how companies should live with corporate politics by maximizing the benefits and minimizing the detriments. Other scholars perceive organizational politics as a form of power play in which powerful individuals dictate organizational outcomes to the detriment of everyone else. In such cases, scholars recommend that organizational leaders should use their leadership capacity to manipulate the outcomes to reduce the detriments and help the firm achieve more positive outcomes (Alapo, 2018). This means that management is responsible for the direction of office politics and the underlying outcomes.

Organizational leaders are responsible for designing and fostering a working environment where workers can be most productive. If office politics hinder productivity, then managers should ensure that only positive politics are practiced within the workplace.

According to Mostafa et al. (2022), managers should manage political behaviors by alienating those with toxic political behaviors or those with self-serving intentions. Additionally, the leaders should maintain the same distance from all workers to ensure that no one is jealous of the other due to the closeness to the leader. The rationale is that negative politics can emanate from

interpersonal relationships with actors with political power. Maintaining a safe distance eliminates one causative risk factor of negative office politics. Other causes of office politics include the allocation and management of organizational resources. In this regard, managers can ensure fairness and equality to prevent negative office politics from erupting (Agina & Abdelhakim, 2021). This means that current research bestows upon the management and organizational leadership the power and responsibility to manage the outcomes of organizational politics.

Even though scholars have offered these and other recommendations on managing office politics, there is a lack of empirical research to justify the recommendations. Additionally, there is a need to gather primary data on the current and best practices in managing office politics. These research gaps mean that the current research can only use theoretical premises to suggest what managers can do.

Organizational commitment

Understanding the concept of organizational commitment is key to assessing its relationship with office politics. From an organizational behavior perspective, the term organizational commitment describes a situation where workers are willing to perform organizational duties and desire to maintain membership in the firm (Ahad et al., 2021). The dictionary definition of the verb 'commit' is binding, devoting, or pledging to a certain policy or course. In this case, the employees are devoting their services to the well-being of the organization. In many cases, employees displaying commitment to an employer tend to feel part of the company, making them feel responsible for its success. According to Grego-Planer (2019), organizational commitment describes the relative strength of an employee's identification with and involvement in a firm. The colloquial term for this definition is a worker's membership to a company. Employees' membership in their firms often results from a reciprocal response to an employer's perceived commitment to the workers. Therefore, commitment can be viewed as the reward for management's efforts to keep workers happy and satisfied with their jobs.

Current literature breaks down organizational commitment into three components: affective, normative, and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is an emotional attachment that an employee has to the organization, which manifests through the extent to which workers want to be part of a firm (Grego-Planer, 2019). In such a case, the employees work out of their own free will without coercion. Continuance commitment is where employees calculate the costs of leaving an organization. When the costs are too high, the workers choose to stay. This also applies when an employee has heavily invested in the company. Lastly, normative commitment entails a sense of moral obligation to remain in a company. It is a sense of loyalty developed through continued engagement with the employer. In this case, it can be argued that the

three categories of organizational commitment involve workers' perceptions of their current employment relative to alternatives. This justifies the earlier argument that commitment rewards management for making the workplace better for its staff.

In many cases, management, specifically human resource management, is responsible for managing employee affairs. The purpose of such undertakings is to enhance the retention and productivity of workers. According to Al-Jabari and Ghazzawi (2019), human resource managers use their knowledge of employee commitment to leverage productivity and retention. This means having an understanding of what employees want in the workplace. For example, some want organizational fairness, which manifests through salary levels, division of duties, shift arrangements, and achievement distribution (Suharto et al., 2019). Employees who feel fairly treated will agree to dedicate their time and effort to the company. They form an attachment that not only keeps them in the company but also makes them exert great efforts in the pursuit of corporate goals. Human resource managers who achieve commitment levels from the workers ensure the success and continuity of the business.

Employee engagement

Employee engagement is a concept that is increasingly gaining scholarly attention as researchers seek to illustrate how engaging employees benefits companies. Its definition is also highly contested as some refer to personal engagement while others argue in favor of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of the employer-employee relationship (Marin, 2021). One definition of employee engagement is utilizing a worker's personality and self-characteristics (cognitive, physical, and emotional) during work. The rationale is that engaged employees have an affective connection with the companies, while disengaged ones do not.

This definition seems to lack a contextual aspect because it fails to explain an engaged employee's physical, behavioral, emotional, or cognitive outcomes. According to Sarangi and Nayak (2016), employee engagement can be described as passion and devotion displayed by employees and the effective leadership they use to support the employees. These scholars establish that employee engagement entails creating a workplace environment where positive emotions, including pride and involvement, are encouraged. Employees emotionally bond with the firm and become passionate about their work.

Many scholars agree that employee engagement describes workers' ability to express themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically during role performance (Murthy, 2021). This implies that emotional and intellectual commitment to a firm are the key indicators of employee engagement. Engagement is founded on various theories, including the self-determination theory (SDT) introduced by Deci and Ryan in 1985. SDT explores motivation factors among

employees and holds that individuals tend to become self-determined when their needs for connection, competence, and autonomy are met. From this perspective, it can be argued that the level of engagement derives from an employee's ability to control personal goals and behaviors (Orsborne & Hammoud, 2017). This means autonomy in the workplace, often manifesting through the extent to which workers are involved in running the organization, including decision-making.

Employee engagement is associated with many positive workplace outcomes, especially regarding performance. According to Murthy (2021), employee engagement results in customer loyalty and high earning per share. Additionally, high levels of engagement lead to financial wellness, ethical and transparent organizational systems, employee productivity, organizational commitment, and employee retention. With these discoveries, researchers have noted that employee engagement has become a critical tool for talent management, especially at a time when talent retention is essential to success and competitiveness (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015). Human resource managers acknowledge the challenges involved in recruiting and retaining top talent. Therefore, engagement gives them a proven tool for ensuring that top talent is retained and not lost to the competition.

Summary and research gaps

Organizational commitment and employee engagement are key determinants of organizational success. Current literature indicates that organizational leaders, especially human resource managers, use these concepts as the cornerstones of organizational success, competitiveness, and talent retention. However, their level of involvement in the workplace dwindles when it comes to office politics, an area where management seems to lack the tools or the means to manage the situation. As a result, the predominant notion of office politics is negative and is associated with detrimental outcomes for organizations. Even though the literature review does not outline the links between office politics and commitment and engagement, it is evident that the nature of organizational politics will influence management decisions surrounding engagement and commitment. Therefore, there is a justifiable need to examine how office politics affect workplace commitment and employee engagement.

Even though current literature adopts a negative view of office politics, a few studies have attempted to show that there is a potentially positive side to it. This observation hints at the possibility of changing the outlook of office politics. Subtle suggestions have been offered on how to manage office politics to produce positive outcomes. However, such recommendations are shallow and may not form an adequate basis for real-life practice. Alternative sources of data will be needed to help develop better recommendations and create a path for further empirical examination.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

Approach and Philosophy

The research approach selected for this study is a descriptive qualitative study. The term 'qualitative research' is a broad umbrella term encompassing a wide range of philosophies and techniques used in examining people's experiences in detail (Hennink et al., 2020). In other words, qualitative research focuses on examining phenomena from the perspective of the target population. Experiences, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs of people form the basis of qualitative research, which explains why qualitative researchers use interviews, surveys, questionnaires, historical records, biographies, and group discussions as the main methods for collecting and analyzing data. Various scholars have attempted to define qualitative research, often encountering challenges due to the multimethod and multifaceted nature of qualitative research. A more central tenet in the definition is that qualitative studies comprise a multimethod focus that involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the subject matter (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This definition implies several premises. First, qualitative research involves studying things in their natural settings. Second, qualitative research focuses on making sense of or interpreting phenomena regarding their meanings to people. Lastly, qualitative research comprises various empirical methods, from case studies, life stories, interviews, visual texts, and personal experiences.

Qualitative research is often associated with fieldwork, especially because it examines phenomena in their natural settings. However, other aspects of the term 'qualitative' imply the possibility of skipping fieldwork. Taken as an antonym for 'quantitative,' qualitative research simply entails the absence of numerical data. Therefore, all studies where the researcher focuses on textual data may be considered qualitative. However, this does not erode the true nature of qualitative research in that scholars often rely on huge volumes of data to offer an in-depth examination of the subject (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The in-depth view is often the most common justification for researchers choosing qualitative methods. In this research, the same rationale is held, where the focus is to offer as much detailed information as possible regarding office politics.

The concept of research philosophy focuses on developing the study assumptions and the nature of research. Assumptions comprise the preliminary reasoning statements regarding the relationships between the research variables. A researcher can choose from different philosophies depending on the nature of the research. In this case, the focus is on presenting a descriptive study on office politics, meaning that the researcher has to describe and interpret massive amounts of secondary data. Therefore, the best philosophy is Interpretivism, which holds that reality is subjective, socially constructed, and displays multiplicity (Žukauskas et al., 2018). Interpretivism works well with qualitative studies because

it allows the researcher to make subjective conclusions based on the perspectives of others.

Study Design

The term study design entails a blueprint or plans a researcher uses to collect, measure, and analyze data to answer the research questions. In this case, the chosen is a cross-sectional study design where data is gathered once. In many cases, cross-sectional designs are observational studies where the researcher measures the outcomes and exposure of the participants at the same time. Even studies on the same variables must study a new set of participants to qualify as cross-sectional. In modern research practices, it is often unnecessary to study new populations as cross-sectional studies can involve a secondary analysis of data collected for another purpose. This loophole makes it possible for this researcher to use secondary data sources as the basis of the research. The previous studies do not have to be qualitative to pass the inclusion criteria. The rationale is that as long as the research can derive insights from a source and is presented qualitatively, any source with relevant information on office politics, its causes and effects, and even recommendations will be used as a valid and reliable data source.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data needed for this research will be obtained from secondary sources. Preferably, the research relies on past studies on the subject of office politics. In this case, only peer-reviewed sources will be used to allow the researcher to verify the data and its collection and analysis by other scholars. However, relying solely on previous studies may limit the scope of exploration on the subject. Therefore, other verifiable records and accounts will also be used. Most importantly, the records of lived experiences with office politics will prove helpful because they help reveal real-life experiences with the subject matter. Such records are also more likely to offer more recent and updated data than historical records and data collected several years ago by other researchers. The main consideration or inclusion criteria will be the verifiability of the data based on the assumption that all sources being considered contain relevant information on office politics.

Qualitative content analysis will be used to analyze the collected secondary data.

Content analysis is widely used in qualitative research. In this research, conventional content analysis will be used because it allows the researcher to develop codes and themes under which to present and interpret the data.

Ethical Considerations

Considering that this is secondary research, there are not many ethical issues that the researcher must contemplate. Using real-life participants in qualitative

research requires careful approaches in dealing with them to avoid harm of any kind. In this research, the scholar relies on data from secondary sources, which helps avoid direct contact with individuals.

However, the data used emanates from sources provided by individuals. Therefore, the researcher has to consider the ethical use of the secondary data. Accrediting authors, researchers, and publishers of the data help avoid plagiarism and other issues involving unauthorized use of data. When using lived experiences, the researcher protects the identity and any personal or sensitive information about the individuals from whom the data records and narrative accounts are obtained.

IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative content analysis is used in this research. Even though inductive reasoning is the most common approach, this research used deductive reasoning due to the use of secondary data. The unit of analysis in qualitative content analysis comprises the themes. In this case, the themes are used as the coding scheme, which is also built around the research questions. Therefore, the themes adopted in this research are factors affecting the prevalence of office politics, the effect of office politics on employee engagement, the effect of office engagement on workplace commitment, and the best practice in managing the detriments of office politics to commitment and engagement.

Factors Affecting the Prevalence of office politics

Research on the factors affecting the prevalence of office politics revealed that this topic has been grossly neglected in scholarly literature. Indeed, only one empirical study was found to address this topic. The study by Aransyah and Hetami (2021) establishes that the main indicators of office politics are budget allocation, unclear objectives, decision-making, job dissatisfaction, power, and salary and promotion. These arguments can be supported by making inferences from scholarly sources. For example, scholars describing office politics as a form of power play hint at the fact that power is a leading cause of office politics (Alapo, 2018). Other aspects have been considered in the literature as outcomes of office politics, including job dissatisfaction (Mostafa et al., 2022; Olusegun, 2019). However, the best ideas regarding the factors affecting the prevalence of office politics emanate from other sources obtained majorly through an internet search. Websites, blogs, and other publications have attempted to offer an understanding of what triggers workplace politics. The findings from these sources are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of key factors causing office politics.

Source Citation	Source Summary	Key Factors
(Juneja, n.d.(a))	The source discusses the meaning and reasons for office politics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of supervision ● Too much gossip

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jealousy ● Arrogant superiors ● Employee aspirations
(Juneja, n.d.(b))	The source discusses the main reasons for workplace politics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal relationships ● Blame games ● Manipulations ● Gossips ● Lack of trust ● Self-serving behaviors
(CFI Team, 2023)	The source discusses office politics. It offers a definition of the term and explains the key reasons why office politics occurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Differences in interests ● The pursuit of power ● Seeking promotion ● Selfish interests

The list of sources in Table 1 is not exhaustive since many of the sources explored have offered the same insights. In most cases, the common theme across the sources include selfish interests, power play, blame games, distrust, personal relationships, and leader characteristics. It can be argued that even though these sources make a compelling case, often based on personal experiences, there is a need to put these ideas to the test and subject them to a scientific study. The rationale is that scientific evidence makes a greater impact in influencing organizational decisions. Organizational leaders who understand the causes of office politics can develop better strategies for reducing the underlying detriments. Without a scholarly approach to these factors, they may remain mere suggestions that managers are unwilling to implement.

Effects of Office Politics on Employee Engagement

The theme of the relationship between office politics and employee engagement has received more scholarly attention than the previous one. Therefore, it was possible to derive data exclusively from recent scientific research papers. Across these studies, the consensus has been that when the perceived office politics is high, the workers are less engaged, which leads to other negative outcomes such as job dissatisfaction and reduced commitment levels (Javed et al., 2015; Byrne et al., 2017; Mersha & Kuhil, 2022). Some studies have focused on the effects of office politics taking worker engagement as a mediating factor (Javed et al., 2015).

However, these studies still find office politics to be detrimental to employee engagement. The relationship between office politics and employee engagement has also been examined using several mediating factors. Examples include Islamic work ethics (Tufail, 2022), supervisor-rated work outcomes (Guo et al., 2019), meaningful work (Landells & Albrecht, 2019), and personality traits (Jain & Ansari, 2018). The findings from these sources indicate the possibility that it does not matter what mediating or moderating factor is used, as office politics always portrays negative effects on workplace engagement.

These findings also indicate the need to closely examine where office politics and worker engagement intersect in the workplace. In this case, the conceptualization of both concepts brings about the broader idea of organizational behavior, which entails how people interact within the workplace and the effects of such interactions. Such interactions can cause frictions, which triggers political behaviors. Engagement is often a response or a reaction to the nature of workplace interactions. In this case, workers who feel victimized by office politics tend to develop negative behaviors towards the organization and their jobs, which detrimentally affects their performance (Jain & Ansari, 2018). The negative behaviors hint at worker disengagement. In this case, the specific mediating factors affect the extent of detriment in the relationship between office politics and worker engagement. For example, personality traits influence the level of employee engagement, meaning that different personalities will respond differently to political behaviors in the workplace (Jain & Ansari, 2018). Similarly, the meaningfulness of work to employees dictates how they perceive politics (Landells & Albrecht, 2019). In this case, they will become increasingly disengaged if they develop negative perceptions of office politics.

Therefore, it can be concluded that it is as important to consider the mediating factors as it is to examine the relationship between office politics and employee engagement. This is because the findings indicate that the mediating factors dictate how employees perceive office politics. Additionally, the perception of office politics affects employee engagement. However, the general finding in this regard is that organizational politics detrimentally affect worker engagement.

Effects of Office Politics on Organizational Commitment

Even though scholarly research regarding this theme is scant, there are enough materials from which conclusions can be drawn. In some cases, researchers on this topic have drawn similar conclusions to the theme of employee engagement – that is, the employee perceptions of office politics have a deleterious effect on

organizational commitment (Park & Lee, 2020; Awan et al., 2014). However, most researchers seem to support the notion that office politics often have positive effects on workplace commitment (Adams et al., 2021; Opoku & Arthur, 2018).

This is an interesting situation because much of the literature associates office politics with negative

workplace outcomes. Before exploring the intersection between politics and politics in a workplace and the mediating factors in this relationship, Table 2 below will summarize the findings on the effects of office politics on organizational commitment.

Table 2: Summary of results regarding the effects of office politics on organizational commitment.

Source Citation	Key Takeaways	Relationship (Positive/Negative)
(Park & Lee, 2020)	Perception of office politics affects organizational outcomes (job satisfaction, commitment, performance, work attitudes). Office politics has a deleterious effect on commitment.	Negative
(Adams et al., 2021)	GATGA type of office politics positively affects commitment, the same case as GPB.	Positive
(Opoku & Arthur, 2018)	Perceptions of organizational politics positively affect commitment. Detrimental effects can be avoided by eliminating unwanted political behavior	Positive
(Awan et al., 2014)	Politics negatively affects commitment, job satisfaction, and performance. Commitment partially mediates between politics and job involvement.	Negative
(Nurhayatia et al., 2017)	Higher perceived office politics reduce organizational commitment. The detriments can be reduced by improving political skills among the workers	Negative
(Atta & Khan, 2016)	GATGA, PPP, and GBP negatively predicted organizational citizenship behavior, affective commitment, and job involvement	Negative
(Umer & Salman, 2018)	A low level of politics leads to higher commitment.	Negative

The most interesting aspect of this theme is that scholarly studies have produced mixed results regarding the effects of office politics on organizational commitment. However, the cause of these differences is difficult to pinpoint. In this case, conceptualizing both concepts may help understand why there are positive and negative outcomes. From the definitions of office politics, it can be argued that individuals fighting for recognition, favors, or promotion intend to maintain or advance their positions with the company. In this case, the purpose of engaging in office politics is to secure one's future in a company, hinting that such employees are committed to their organization. Such an argument explains why some scholars believe the detriments of office politics to commitment are greater among older employees (Park & Lee, 2020). A further rationalization for this argument is that some scholars find GATGA politics also positively affect commitment. In essence, workers hoping to get ahead in an organization are expressing their desires to remain in a company, which could also be interpreted as a commitment to one's organization (Adams et al., 2021). Therefore, some circumstances are capable of yielding positive results.

Another possible explanation for the mixed results is the role of contextual and mediating factors. For example, the study by Opoku and Arthur (2018) is based on the public sector context, where politics play a critical role in one's well-being and advancement through the ranks. Therefore, workers in the sector embrace politics,

and most use it to ensure the continuity of their careers in such organizations. Most studies that indicate a negative relationship between office politics and organizational commitment are based on the private sector context. Regarding mediating factors, some scholars have used job attitudes (Atta & Khan, 2016), political skills (Nurhayatia et al., 2017), and job involvement (Awan et al., 2014). Despite these explanations, updates in this discourse would be necessary to clarify the differences or offer a better evidence-based explanation of why positive relations manifest between office politics and organizational commitment.

Best Practices in Managing Detriments of Office Politics

This is another theme that has received inadequate scholarly attention. Despite many scholars associating office politics with negative work outcomes, they have failed to offer practical solutions on how to address the detriments. Most importantly, no studies currently discuss how to reduce the detrimental effects of office politics on employee engagement or organizational commitment. However, examining the mediating factors and the intersection between the concepts can help derive the necessary inferences from the available literature. The main argument across many studies is that office politics should not always be a destructive organizational behavior and that it could be tuned to generate positive results for employees and the organizations (Rony et al., 2020). This suggests that organizational leaders and employees should develop the necessary political skills to survive office

politics and obtain positive organizational outcomes (García-Chas et al., 2018; Cullen et al., 2015; Moon & Morais, 2022). These studies have only hinted that developing political skills helps mitigate the detriment of office politics. They fail to explain what political skills involve.

In this case, it can be argued that employees and organizational leaders have a role to play in determining whether office politics will produce positive or negative results. The rationale is that political behaviors cannot be entirely eliminated in the workplace (Aransyah & Hetami, 2021). This means that organizational leaders should disregard any suggestions that eliminating it from the workplace is the ultimate solution to negative outcomes of office politics. Contrary to such scholars as Olorunleke (2015), the workplace cannot be devoid of politics. The best course of action is to train employees how to deal with politics. Only the politically skilled or the most resilient employees seem to have a chance to survive politics. Some scholars argue that resilience should be accompanied by transformational leadership to help amplify its effects (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017). In essence, workplaces with negative office politics must be transformed into ones that embrace positive office politics.

Discussion Summary

The results and discussion chapter has addressed all the research questions. The chapter has established the causes of office politics, the effects of workplace politics on organizational commitment and employee engagement, and highlighted the best practices on how to reduce the detriments of office politics. The research has relied on secondary data, majorly on past research studies on related topics. As things stand, the chapter has highlighted the need for further studies because gaps still exist that could not be filled using secondary data. However, the purpose of the study has been achieved. The main arguments include that office politics carry a negative notion. Since it is impossible to remove politics from the workplace, it is suggested that leadership and employees must redesign their political behaviors or become more resilient to survive destructive politics. However, the study also finds that office politics can be positive. Considering the scarcity of data in this regard, this area can be considered a major research gap that must be explored.

X. RECOMMENDATION

Office politics cannot be eliminated from the workplace. Unfortunately, available literature lacks adequate evidence on how organizations can design office politics to derive positive outcomes while eliminating the detriments. Therefore, the recommendations made in this regard can only be supported by various arguments regarding the factors causing the prevalence of office politics and any relevant literature on the same. In this

case, it is prudent to argue that the detriments of office politics can be addressed through the underlying factors. Some of these recommendations are designed to address the antecedents of negative office politics.

Redesigning Personal Relationships

One of the main causes of workplace politics is personal relationships. In some cases, people can go all out to support their friends and colleagues at the workplace, raising friction and causing conflicts. An organization that fosters good personal relationships benefits from workplace cohesion. Divisions among workers cause them to take sides on major matters and decisions. Therefore, it is recommended that organizational leaders need to redesign personal relationships in the workplace to help eliminate negative office politics. Rather than members criticizing each other, they can share knowledge and ideas to reach mutual decisions and outcomes.

Avoiding Blame Games

Blame games within an organization never yield anything positive. It indicates the inability of workers to take responsibility for workplace outcomes and blame others as a form of escape or a scheme to implicate others. Negative politics are associated with pursuing selfish interests, often at the expense of other employees and the organization. Some find fault in others and cannot refrain from voicing negative remarks about colleagues. Organizational leaders should acknowledge that such behavior only leads to negative office politics and should find means of eliminating it. Employees should be trained on the dangers of blame games and on ways to resolve issues without blaming outcomes on others.

Building Trust

Lack of trust in the workplace is likely to cause negative political behaviors. Trust means that people can confide in their colleagues without fearing betrayal. Lack of trust leads to suspicions, which causes individuals to go behind the backs of their colleagues. Once such behaviors are noted, the entire workplace becomes un conducive for workers. Trust is the backbone of personal relationships. Organizational leaders hoping for cohesion and teamwork must start with building trust among the workers. In this case, the effects will go beyond the negative office politics. The rationale is that where workers have good relations with others, they become more engaged, and their level of commitment is likely to grow.

Address Negative Political Behaviors

Negative political behaviors are a broad term. However, the definitions of office politics given in the literature review insinuate that any behavior associated with negative outcomes for workers and the organization is negative. Addressing the GPB to make it positive may require managers to develop a unified vision of what comprises positive politics and lead the workplace toward achieving that vision.

Fairness and Equality in Pay and Promotion

Negative politics also erupt in workplaces where managers fail to ensure fairness and equality in pay and promotion or even in resource allocation. Therefore, it is recommended that organizational leaders have a critical role in eliminating favoritism and other perceived unfair actions.

XI. CONCLUSION

Office politics is a serious topic in organizational behavior, but it has not received adequate scholarly attention. Even more unfortunate, it appears that employees and managers lack the necessary means to deal with it. As such, it is possible to find individuals preferring to sit out office politics rather than become actively involved. The major downside of such a strategy is that one does not have to be involved to be affected. Since office politics cannot be eliminated from the workplace, scholarly work should have dedicated adequate time and effort to develop solutions.

This research aimed to illustrate how office politics affect organizational commitment and employee engagement. The findings indicated that office politics caused detriments to engagement depending on employee perceptions. In organizational commitment, mixed results were observed. Some scholars indicated positive outcomes, while most showed negative outcomes. Contextual and mediating factors were mentioned as possible explanations for these differences. However, these can only be suggestions because the scholars have not offered their findings on the same. However, it was not surprising that some studies produced positive relationships because the literature review defined and described positive office politics.

Besides the effects of office politics on employee engagement and organizational commitment, the study also examined the key factors affecting the prevalence of office politics and offered recommendations on how to deal with office politics. The main conclusion in this regard is that political behaviors are part of the broader organizational behaviors and that management is responsible for the nature of such behaviors. Political behaviors can be triggered by personal relationships, lack of trust, and perceived unfairness and inequality in pay and promotion. Addressing these factors can help management ensure that any political behaviors arising from the workplace are positive. These two areas have not received much scholarly attention. Therefore, conclusive arguments will depend on further scholarly research.

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