

## UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS IN INDONESIA: EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION ON ITS PRACTICE, ANTECEDENTS, AND OUTCOMES

Hafid Fahrian, Mirwan Surya Perdhana <sup>1</sup>

[hafidfahrian11@gmail.com](mailto:hafidfahrian11@gmail.com)

Departemen Manajemen Fakultas Ekonomika dan Bisnis Universitas Diponegoro  
Jl. Prof. Soedharto SH Tembalang, Semarang 50239, Phone: +622476486851

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to investigate the perception of Indonesian Generation Y and Generation Z employee to organizational politics with modern business context in mind. Organizational politics has been popularly viewed as a negative phenomenon within firms, as it often researched using a negatively biased method. The study is catalyzed by the call of past researches to explore deeper the field of organizational politics and to bring a more balanced view of it.*

*Qualitative method, specifically the qualitative phenomenological method, was chosen for this study. The use of phenomenology enabled this research to deliver in-depth understanding for the perception of organizational politics. Informants of this research were drawn from various Indonesian companies, with proportional demographics distribution in term of age cohort and gender.*

*Based on the findings, there are four categories of employee's political perception, that are Necessary, Necessary to Some Extent, Neutral, and Should be Avoided. This study has also successfully recognized the antecedents of organizational politics, which can lead to the rise political behavior within an organization. Additionally, this study also identified the outcomes of organizational politics that were further classed into two dimensions: individual and organizational impact, with informants' description encompassed both positive and negative outcomes. Keywords: perception of organizational politics, qualitative study, balanced view on organizational politics.*

**Keywords:** Purchase Decision, Lemonilo, Brand Awareness, Quality Perception, Price Perception, Brand Trust.

### INTRODUCTION

Modern commercial organizations are political arenas in which managers utilize organizational politics such as lobbying, ingratiation, coalition building, and the use of social skills to influence decisions (Pfeffer, 1981; Mintzberg, 1985). Organizational politics, especially the way it is primarily perceived by employees and managers, has become one of the most interesting areas to study in business administration, management and applied psychology. Organizational politics research dates back to the early twentieth century, when enterprises were regarded as arenas that were inextricably political. Many people despise the word politics because it conjures up images of shady behavior that is deceptive, divisive, and solely self-serving.

Research has paid significant attention to perceptions of organizational politics (POPs), which are defined as "factors that contribute to employees perceiving a work environment as political in nature" (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). Perceptions of organizational politics (POP) is described as an individual's subjective evaluation of how self-serving some individuals and organizations in their workplace are to the disadvantage of others. POP is important because it is associated with an array of personal and organizational dimensions that can affect performance of both subjects.

It is generally accepted that stigma on the politics itself causes negative view on the practice of organizational politics (Chang et al. 2009). Empirical research reveals that political perceptions are linked to a variety of bad outcomes, both in individual and organizational level. The concept that political perceptions can accurately predict poorer levels of job satisfaction, performance, and commitment, as well as higher levels of turnover intentions and job conflicts, is supported by empirical evidence (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010). However, even of this stigma, scholars have agreed on the importance of political activity as a one of the main component of firms' social context (Hochwarter,

2012). Organizational politics, according to (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010), is an innately human activity motivated by both self- and societal motives.

### **THE NECESSITY TO BRING A MORE BALANCED VIEW**

The study on the topic of Organizational Politics has attracted considerable amount of attention from researchers for the last 30 years (Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014). To this date, much of the research on organizational politics has concluded it as a mainly negative phenomenon (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2003). However, some researchers have argued that organizational politics has some considerable positive outcomes, in light of its negative consequences (Byrne et al., 2017; Soares, 2018; Landells & Albrecht, 2017).

Realizing that organizational politics is unavoidable within workplace, recent researches has sought to pursuit a more balanced look into the organizational politics, mainly in investigating if there are positive aspects of organizational politics that could be beneficial to individual as well as organizational level. Numerous studies have been conducted in an effort to dive deeper into this matter. For example, a study has found that a negatively perceived organizational politics can act as potential benefit provider if employee perceive it as a challenge stressor (Byrne et al., 2017).

Many of the previous research on OP was conducted with Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale, in which it now seen as negatively biased (POPS, Ferris and Kacmar 1989, 1992; Kacmar and Carlson 1997; Kacmar and Ferris 1991) quoted from Landells & Albrecht (2017). Researchers (Dipboye and Foster 2002; McFarland et al. 2012) have noted the negative bias on the 12-item version of the 6-measurement system developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). They criticize the five dimensions of politics used in POPS, stating that the majority of the measurement points refer to negative aspects of politics, rendering it to be a bias. Furthermore, McFarland et al. (2012) suggest that a qualitative study would contribute greatly to the understanding of OP. The notion for qualitative study in OP was further elaborated by Hochwarter (2012) stating that “organizational politics research requires new and insightful approaches that promote richer interpretations of this important phenomenon” in order to develop a more balanced understanding of OP. Nevertheless, a qualitative study on this topic is not novel, there has been numerous research done on this field using the qualitative method. Landells & Albrecht (2017) for example conducted the investigation of positives and negatives of OP using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with subjects of the study taken in Australian workplaces.

### **METHOD**

This research intends to discover the lived experience of organizational politics and the outcomes of that phenomenon by considering both its positive and negative outcomes on individual and organizational level, particularly on the subject of Generation Y and Generation Z employee. Thus, the proposed method of this qualitative study is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that intends to investigate a phenomenon by exploring the perspective by subjects that experience it (Neubauer et al., 2019). To be more specific, this research will use the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method.

Smith and Eatough (2007) points out the common standards of doing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research, where commonly, researchers only use small samples of informants. This informant’s quantity ranges from samples of one, four, nine, fifteen. The small amount of sample is deliberate, with objective to provide an in-depth analysis of each sample’s response. This goal is in contrast with the commonly used quantitative method on the subject of organizational politics.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

This study will be conducted in Indonesia by interviewing informants of Indonesian employees from Generation Y and Generation Z. To determine the age range of these two generations, the data from Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) was used. The BPS determines that Generation Y are people who were born between 1981-1996, while Generation Z are those who were born in the years between 1997-2012.

Ten participants will be recruited across multiple Indonesian firms using the purposive sampling method. The majority of IPA researchers often use very homogeneous samples, in contrast to descriptive phenomenology, which frequently uses maximum sampling of variances (Langdridge, 2008). The objective is to assemble a group of individuals so that the researcher may draw conclusions about them and their shared experiences (Langdridge, 2008). All of the participants in this research would have a common lived experience, which would include participating in organized political engagement or witnessed a practice of political behavior. Participants interviewed came from differing company background which include multi-national enterprise, government institution, state owned enterprise, and private company.

To ensure the data collection will fulfill the research objective and to avoid biased conclusion, a set of criterions for informants are listed below for them to qualify as a subject for this research: 1) male and/or female within the age range of Generation Y and Generation Z; and 2) have had working experience for at least one year, in order for them to be aware of the practice of organizational politics within their workplace.

### **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured interview. The interviewee will be able to provide as much information/experience as feasible in this style of interview. Due to the continuing COVID-19 epidemic, which limits the capacity to do a face-to-face interview, the interview will be performed via any available online platforms for both the researcher and the interviewee. Ten questions were asked as a standard question delivered to the interview subjects, with follow-up questions to be asked when it is deemed necessary to obtain further information. This practice is done in order to obtain unique answer and information that later will be processed to develop key themes of the research. The questions given included but not limited to “How would you define politics in your organization?”, “Can you provide three examples of political behavior in your organizations?”, “Do you think the use of organizational politics necessary within your organization?” “What do you see as the consequences of exercising organizational politics in an organization?”

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

This research will employ interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA). There are no preset research hypotheses in interpretative phenomenological analysis; rather, the focus is on people's impressions of an event or what it means to them (Langdridge, 2008). In contrast to descriptive phenomenology, there is more involvement with mainstream psychological literature (mainly social-cognitive) and less emphasis on description (Langdridge, 2008). Each interview must have a transcript made in order to evaluate it. After listening to the tape recording of each interview session, this phase involves writing up the questions and replies. The focus of the transcript will be on semantic context, which is essentially what the interview subject said (Langbridge, 2007). The analysis will employ thematic analysis. In order to fully understand the interviewee's perspective, the researcher will spend a lot of time going over the transcript in search of recurring themes

This study uses the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which has several stages for its data analysis. Researcher will read the transcript several times while writing side notes on the relevance of a particular response or passage. Depending on the level of information, comments might include summaries, connections, and interpretations. To increase the likelihood that the genuine meaning of the transcript will be understood, the stage will be repeated for numerous times. The themes that arise are then noted. The subjects that come up are then recorded on a different sheet of paper. In this phase, the researcher looks for a connecting theme among the various subjects that have emerged in order to organize them in a more analytical way. The themes are then put in chronological order in a table by the researcher. The source material is now accurately recognized and linked with each theme. A theme could be dropped if it does not fit with the main theme (Langdridge, 2008). The process is repeated for each occurrence until a complete table of themes that includes every example in the research can be produced (Langdridge, 2008).

Once those procedures are finished, the researcher can either go to the next case or interview and repeat the process there, or use the current table as a reference for evaluating other interviews. The study will be supplemented by the use of additional data sources, including papers, the internet, and personal observation.

## RESULTS

Three high order themes emerged from the IPA across 10 interviews. The first theme describes the variety of perspectives expressed by interview. It aims on how an employee sees on the political activity within their organization and how they feel about it. The second theme attempts to explore and identify on interviewees' opinion on why organizational politics occurs, in which he catalyst of organizational politics behavior can emerge from either individual or organizational level or both. The third theme concentrates on the participants perception of the delivered impact of organizational politics behavior on individual and organizational level. There are multiple comments made by participants regarding the impact of political practice, both in positive and negative tone.

### THEME 1: VIEW ON ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

This theme describes the variety of perspectives expressed by interview. It aims on how an employee sees on the political activity within their organization and how they feel about it. The comments made by interviewee on how they perceive organizational politics resulted in the emergence of sub themes, that is their perception on the practice of organizational politics which range from Necessary to Should Be Avoided. Three out of ten participants believe that organizational politics to be necessary to be practiced within the organization. Informant AP believes that organizational politics is an unavoidable consequence of interacting within the company and she felt that this circumstance will deliver benefits towards the company itself, as long as it is supported by a good organizational culture. Informant IW and IA on the other hand thinks that organizational politics is necessary because the well beingness of the company can improve because of it.

The next viewing point is necessary to some extent, in which organizational member still believes organizational politics to be needed yet it has to fit into a certain boundary. Four participants viewed organizational politics to fit into this category, those are Informant SQ, AW, DA, and SW. Informant SQ and DA thinks that organizational politics can be utilized as a tool to achieve goal, whether it is personal or organizational goals. Yet they strongly suggest that organizational can only be leveraged as long as it doesn't incur any damage nor break any ethical barrier.

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There are some unique cases on the perception over the practice of organizational politics. These are the are of Informant NC, MD, and DS. Informant MD's view on the phenomenon can be considered as neutral, he refuses to participate in the practice of it yet still not being antipathy towards it. Similar to Informant MD, Informant DS also perceived politics in her organization using Neutral standpoint. She was indecisive on her stance when inquired regarding the necessity of organizational politics. Informants NC thinks that organizational politics as something unnecessary and should be avoided. She believes that organizational politics can only serve organizational progress stalling.

### THEME 2: ANTECEDENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

This theme attempts to explore and identify on interviewees' opinion on why organizational politics occurs. The catalyst of organizational politics behavior can emerge from either individual or organizational level or both. The theme is then categorized further into subthemes that are Consolidation of Power, Culture within Organization, Conflict of Interest, Self-Serving Behavior.

Three informants (SQ, SW, MD) attributed organizational politics to the phenomenon consolidation of power. The phenomenon can be closely associated with the attempts of those trying to have a better grip on the power struggle within the contested ground by utilizing organizational politics behavior. Informant SW provided an example of a political behavior that often practiced within his company that can be interpreted as one of the reasons why the behavior occurs on the first place, which is interpreted as an attempt of this opposition group trying to keep their legitimacy by picturing themselves as a source of alternative solution. On the topic of what catalyze organizational politics, Informant MD provided an account that he witnessed when people try to keep a close distance to powerful person in order to gain power for themselves.

On the case of organizational culture that serves as antecedents of organizational politics, four informants (DA, AP, NC, DS) categorized the circumstances as the trigger for organizational politics. Informant DA opinion on what catalyze organizational politics lies within the structure of the organization itself, in which politics behavior often found entangled within the company's policy and culture as it effects how the employee will perceive organizational politics. The structure of the company and the dominant culture within the organization is what Informant AP thinks as one of the major reasons for organizational politics behavior to occur within a company. Informant NC's thinking on the reason why organizational politics occur rests on the dominant culture being adopted throughout the organization itself. Informant DS perceived the catalyst of politics within her organization to be connected to the culture of her organization, particularly regarding the culture of 'yes-man-ism'

For the conflict of interest, four informants (AP, AW, IW, IA) gave their agreement for the cause of organizational politics to occur. Informant AP links the appearance of organizational politics behavior to differences of objectives and priorities between departments. From his work experience as well as phenomenon he witnessed; Informant AW gave a conclusion on why organizational politics behavior rises is connected to the different interests of different parties. He provided example of vacation proposal given by the employee to their superior as a form of conflict of interest, in which organizational politics may occur as both parties try to push their own agenda. Informant IW further stated that the different interest from divisions within the company can also gave rise to the organizational politics behavior. The statement given by him explained that the differences between parties involved, especially regarding with the goals they want to achieve will result in the practice of organizational politics itself. Informant IA puts an emphasis in describing antecedents of political behavior as a matter of conflict of interest between parties, in which she stated that participation of multiple parties in fighting a scarce resource will most of the time resulted in the utilization of organizational politics as a mean to win that resources as the sanctioned way of doing by the organization may not be enough.

The last antecedents identified is the self-serving behavior that arise within organization. Two informants believe this unsanctioned behavior may serves as the seed of political activity in an organization. The behavior that often self-centered, that aims to benefit one party only is what Informant AW thinks can cause a political behavior in organization. That behavior also often neglects what the usual SOP on decision making, which in turn can cause a damage to the organization. Informant IW thinks that one of the reasons of why organizational politics occurs is the tendency of people to push their own agenda. He, without hesitant, points out that there are some people or groups that only want their objective to be achieved where they will utilize organizational politics behavior to complete their agenda. This behavior can harm the company in general as these people or groups will carry out their agenda without considering company's original goal.

### **THEME 3: SIGNIFICANT IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS**

The theme concentrates on the participants perception of the delivered impact of organizational politics behavior on individual and organizational level. There are multiple comments made by participants regarding the impact of political practice, both in positive and negative tone. These comments were then categorized into sub themes which are Individual Level: Positive, Individual Level: Negative, Organizational Level: Constructive, Organizational Level: Hindrance.

The study reveals that there are two levels of organizational aspect that can be affected by political behavior in the office, that is organizational and individual level. The mentioned organizational aspects experienced both positive and also negative outcomes by the practice of political behavior. Table 1 will provide a summary of perceived positive and negative outcomes on both organizational and individual level with numbers indicating how many times the outcome was mentioned.

**Table 1**  
Perceived Outcomes of Organizational Politics

	Positive Outcomes	Negative Outcomes
Individual Level	Increased competitive advantage (2) Enhanced position (1) Career Progression (1)	Job anxiety (1) Frustration (3)
Organizational Level	Increased organization productivity (2) Attainment of organizational goals (2)	High turnover rate (1) Promoting unprofessional environment (1) Creating distrust among employee (1)

## DISCUSSION

Study of organizational politics and the effort of looking deeper into the perception of organizational politics has reached a significant point in which the past 30 years of research has created a theoretical basis while also providing foundation for the future (Hochwarter et al., 2019). Following this notion, this study aims to provide a contribution to the research stream in investigating organizational politics. Consistent with the suggestion for the use of qualitative method on the research of organizational politics (McFarland et al., 2012), this research presented that the traditional negatively framed perception of organizational politics needed to be clarified and elaborated further. Finding within this study suggested that employee may view the phenomenon of organizational politics with various interpretation. Another finding of this study has resulted in the identification of antecedents of the political behavior as well as the perceived outcomes from the practice of organizational politics. The outcomes identified were not universally negative in terms of impact towards organization and its member, there are some instances in which organizational politics can provide an advantage towards the two aforementioned organizational aspect.

Overall, this study and its finding supports the call for a more balanced perspective on organizational politics (Hochwarter, 2012). A key implication of this study is that the traditionally and widely used model for measuring organizational politics, the POPS (Ferris and Kacmar 1989, 1992; Kacmar and Carlson 1997; Kacmar and Ferris 1991), is unable to capture the definition of organizational politics that can be shared by organizational members as a whole. This study also provided another argument on the view organizational politics from different nation and culture. A previous qualitative study on organizational politics has also been conducted in Australia (Landells & Albrecht, 2017), which comes into similar conclusion where organizational members may see the practice of organizational politics with multitude of views and cannot be universally streamlined. For the case of Indonesia, this study provided a jumping point for more elaborative study without using the negatively framed scale and model as had been previously done by Gunawan and Santosa (2012).

On the subject of generational differences, this study did not find any identifiable pattern that suggested how a generation may collectively perceive the practice of organizational politics and its impact within working space. The responses of each individual vary in each generation, with wide range of answer spectrum regarding view on organizational politics, antecedents, and also consequences of organizational politics. This study has concluded that the contributing factor for development of one's perception of organizational politics was not tied into specific generational membership, but rather to personal characteristics and working experiences.

The result of this research answered the call for a more balanced view on the organizational politics (Hochwarter, 2012) and the suggestion of using qualitative method while studying organizational politics in an effort to evade the biased measurement system of POPS (McFarland et al., 2012). This study also confirms the fact that organizational politics is difficult to identify and thus the focus should be shifted towards the perceived politics instead as suggested by (Hochwarter, 2020). This research also provided more insight on the qualitative method as a methodology that can be used to further investigate organizational politics. The use of IPA can be integrated into the existing theory instead of focusing in the discovery of theory. In the light of this finding, research on organizational politics should begin to discard its negatively framed notion. It should be acknowledged that organizational politics is a subjective experience recorded by each individual and is not limited into specific behaviors.

### **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The research has implications for organizational members, more specifically leaders and managers. Organizational politics should no longer be treated as universal phenomenon where each organizational member will have the same experience on it. It can be concluded from this study that individual's perspective towards organizational politics can evolve as their understanding on it matures over time. From this conclusion, it is suggested that organization can develop an initiative that could educate organizational members on the different lens of organizational politics perception and how in each perception may yield different result. Perceived organizational politics has been empirically proven to be related to uncertainty within organization (Madison, 1980). Thus, after concluding the prevalent perceived organizational politics within organization, managers should establish a strict organization structure, as a clear structure can serve as an instrument to remove uncertainties within organization, especially relating to power distribution.

Managers may also try to evaluate to which extent the variety of perspectives that present within their organization. As organizational politics is inevitable, it is invaluable for leaders to have these insights and develop deeper understanding on what kind of politics that exist within the organization. Albeit the provided positive outcomes of organizational politics, researcher has agreed that overly political organization will only yield negative result. Thus, it is in the best of interest of organization for managers to formulate and implements method to control the development of politics within their organization.

### **LIMITATIONS**

This research has been done in accordance to the research guidelines. However, there are still limitations that need to be improved. Limitations in conducting this research is collecting primary data in the form of interviews carried out boldly so that researchers cannot enter the research area directly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This causes limitations and obstacles in communicating such as an unstable signal thus disrupting the interview process.

There was a participant whose membership in the company was only as an intern, thus the author acknowledged that the data provided by the particular participant may unable to paint or contributed to the description of organizational politics in general. This was caused due to the differences of experience lived by a permanent employee and internee, in which internee's experience in general is only partial compared to those of full-time employee. Participants may also did not share their perspectives with complete honesty as they may share their view based on the socially agreed values and based upon text book theory, not by their ow personal experience.

## FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

The limitation of this study can be a source of idea on which future study can develop further. The given suggestions are:

1. The need to investigate further regarding the correlation of organizational politics to employee's cultural background. This suggestion reflects to the fact that individual perception is often shaped by the culture of its surrounding.
2. The necessity to examine the connection of individuals political skill and how they perceive the practice of organizational politics.
3. The development of a new quantitative method to provide a more neutral scale in the measurement of organizational politics and its connection to variables that can be quantitatively measured such as job commitment, job performance, etc

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