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## ANTECEDENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS (EVIDENCE FROM PAKISTANI PUBLIC SECTOR)

*The purpose of the paper is to investigate the effects of participation in decision-making, role stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict) and Machiavellianism on organizational politics perception. Through the questionnaire survey, 112 responses were collected from the employees working under federal government which showed role ambiguity and Machiavellianism as the key predictors of politics perception.*

*Keywords: participation in decision-making; role ambiguity; role conflict; Machiavellianism; perception of politics.*

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## ПЕРЕДУМОВИ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ (ЗА ДАНИМИ ДЕРЖАВНОГО СЕКТОРА ПАКИСТАНУ)

*У статті вивчено вплив участі в процесі ухвалення рішень, ролевих стрес-чинників (рольова неоднозначність і рольовий конфлікт) і макіавеллізму на сприйняття організаційної політики. Проведено анкетне опитування 112 співробітників федерального уряду. Результати показали, що рольова неоднозначність і макіавеллізм – ключові чинники сприйняття політики.*

*Ключові слова: участь в ухваленні рішень, рольова неоднозначність, рольовий конфлікт, макіавеллізм, сприйняття політики.*

*Табл. 3. Рис. 1. Літ. 51.*

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## ПРЕДПОСЫЛКИ ОРГАНИЗАЦИОННОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ (ПО ДАННЫМ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО СЕКТОРА ПАКИСТАНА)

*В статье изучено влияние участия в процессе принятия решений, ролевых стресс-факторов (ролевая неоднозначность и ролевой конфликт) и макиавеллизма на восприятие организационной политики. Проведен анкетный опрос 112 сотрудников федерального правительства. Результаты показали, что ролевая неоднозначность и макиавеллизм – ключевые факторы в восприятии политики.*

*Ключевые слова: участие в принятии решений, ролевая неоднозначность, ролевой конфликт, макиавеллизм, восприятие политики.*

**Introduction.** Organizational politics is a fact of organizational life and nearly all organizations experience some kind of politics in their work life (Davis and Gardner, 2004; Vigoda, 2003). Literature shows mainly two types of constructs exploring the existence of politics within an organization. A main stream of researchers examine active involvement of employees in politics also termed as "influence tactics" or political behavior. Ferris et al. (1989) defined political behavior as a behavior strategically designed to maximize self-interests and therefore contradict the collective organizational goals or the interests of other individuals (Ferris et al., 1989). The other relates to perceived examination of politics known as "perception of organizational politics".

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According to Kacmar and Carlson (1997) and Kacmar and Ferris (1991), perceptions of organizational politics represents the degree to which respondents view their work environment as political, promoting self-interests of others, and thereby unjust and unfair.

Organizational politics or perception of politics is one of the extensively researched phenomenon, yet need more investigation due to its significance for each kind of organization. Moreover, its intensity and possible causes vary from culture to culture leading to the importance of identifying key factors associated with perception of politics in different micro and macro settings (Poon, 2006). Most of contemporary researches are focused on investigating causes and effects of perception of politics across organizations (Poon, 2003; Vigoda, 2000; Muhammad 2007).

More importantly, if we consider the arguments of Hofstede (1980; 1993), theories and research implications arising from a cultural setting cannot be generalized to other environment by ignoring the culture (cultural dimensions as prescribed by Hofstede, 1980 and 1991) of a host country. However, organizations operating in culturally identical countries may share the findings. In short, contextual significance is quite important to be taken into account (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, and Bond, 1984).

Hofstede (1980; 1984) specified 5 dimensions of a national culture which differentiate a culture from others at the macrolevel. These dimensions include: power/distance (PD), individualism (IDV), masculinity (MAS), uncertainty/avoidance index (UAI) and long-term orientation (LTO). Pakistani culture shows different results as compared to the US and the UK and Australia on the 5 dimensions prescribed by Hofstede (1980).

However, cultural dimensions with respect to US, UK and Australia are nearly similar indicating that the research findings from these countries can be applied to other two (with some limitations) but cannot be for Pakistan. Since most of the research findings on organizational politics are reported from developing world (Darr and Johns, 2004; Vigoda, 2000; Rosen et al., 2009; Harrell-Cook et al., 2009), this emphasizes the developing world to explore the phenomenon and report the results to know similarities and differences. In this way, this research was an attempt to know the key antecedents of perception of politics from a developing country like Pakistan. This study attempts to explore the effects of participation in decision-making (PDM), role conflict and role ambiguity, and Machiavellianism, which have been proved as the most parsimonious factors in various environments of developed world (Parker, Dipboye and Jackson, 1995; Ashforth and Lee, 1990; O'connor and Morrison, 2001).

**Organizational Factor. Participation in Decision-Making:** Participation in decision-making (PDM) refers to the mutual influence of supervisors and subordinates in organizational decisions (Vroom, 1960; Wagner & Gooding, 1997). PDM phenomenon is closely associated with Theory "Y" by McGregor (1960). Theory "Y" posits that employees usually love to work and voluntarily accept assignments under favorable working conditions. But managers play an important role in maintaining their morale and motivation. Employees should be given enough opportunities to be involved in decisions making process relating to their personal and organizational objectives. Open communication and coordinated efforts are necessary for effective organizational operations (Northouse, 2004).

Previous researches show a categorical interest of researchers in structural factors predicting perceived politics perception (Riley, 1983). Especially, formalization and centralization are the two main factors proved influential in explaining perception of politics (Valle and Perrew, 2000; Buenger et al., 2007; Muhammad, 2007).

Centralization "refers to the extent to which the decision involvement and evaluate activities is concentrated while decentralization is the degree to which the right of decision-making is distributed to different structural components" (Fredrickson, 1986). The inverse of centralization (decentralization) provides a close resemblance with participation in decision-making which refers to the extent to which staff members participate in setting the goals and policies of the entire organization (Vigoda and Cohen, 2002). Past studies confirmed the strong link between centralization and perception of politics (Kacmar et al., 1999; Valle and Perrew, 2000). Parker, Dipboye and Jackson (1995) were the first to identify this similarity and measured centralization as an alternative to employees' decision involvement opportunities.

Participation in decision-making remains a critical organizational factor in predicting perception of organizational politics. Parker, Dipboye and Jackson (1995) stated that employees perceive their working environment as less threatened by politics when they are involved in decision making. Same findings were observed by Vigoda (2002) between PDM and perception of politics. In contrast, the study of Vigoda and Cohen (2004) and Kacmer et al. (1999) couldn't confirm the impact of participation in decision-making on perception of politics. However, we may assume that if an organization wishes to address the problems associated with organizational politics, then it should focus on decentralized hierarchy where employees are involved in decision-making (Katrinli et al., 2010). This provided the basis for the following hypothesis:

H1: *Participation in decision-making significantly affects perception of politics.*

**Job/Task Factor.**

**Role Ambiguity.** Role ambiguity occurs when role expectations as well as methods to complete job tasks are not clearly defined for employees (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970).

Various past studies have validated the direct link between role ambiguity and perception of politics (Ashforth and Lee, 1990; Poon, 2003; Muhammad, 2007). But the initial work relating to organizational politics and clarity of task requirements were made in terms of formalization. Formalization refers to the degree to which organizational rules define roles, authority relations, communications, norms, sanctions, and procedures (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993: 56). Under highly formalized environment, standards and rules are enacted so that employee behaviors do not deviate from the goals of a firm (Auh and Menguc, 2007). Role ambiguity provides opposite connotation to formalization. This description was first interpreted by Parker, Dipboye and Jackson (1995) in examining the direct impact of clarity of roles/responsibilities towards politics perception. They found a significant negative relationship. Preceding studies had already established negative relationship between formalization and perception of politics (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996). Ferris et al. (1989) considered formalization as one of the predictor towards perception of politics in their politics perceptions model.

Majority of later studies selected and confirmed the role ambiguity as a critical factor in explaining perceived politics (Poon, 2003; Muhammad, 2007). Since employees perceive high prevalence of politics surrounding their working environment under uncertain and ambiguous conditions, the following statement is hypothesized:

H2: *Role ambiguity significantly impacts perception of politics.*

**Role Conflict.** Role conflict refers to the incompatibility of expectations from a role (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Existing literature lacks any direct impact of role conflict on organizational politics. Andrew and Kacmar (2001) made both role conflict and perception of politics parts of their research model but did not examine their relationship. There exist few evidences where the moderating role of political skills was investigated on the relationship of role conflict to job performance (Meurs, Gallagher and Perrew, 2010) and role conflict to burnout (Jawahar, Stone and Kisamor, 2007). The empirical analysis of Harris, Harris and Harvey (2010) is a unique contribution because it proved the significant impact of politics perception on role conflict directly and indirectly, through perceived organizational support.

The theoretical underpinning for role conflict can be obtained from the Path-Goal Theory (of leader effectiveness) which emphasizes managers to perform their effective role by providing guidance to their subordinate employees in achieving their personal and organizational goals (House, 1971). Under highly conflicting environment, employees have the perception of incompatibility of expectations from the role expectations in a way that complying with one role may make the other role compliance difficult (Ilgen and Hollenbeck, 1991). In such environment managers should extend every possible support to their employees in understanding the work assignments (goals) and how to complete these assignments (the path required) to achieve those goals. Managers are further supposed to guide them on how to deal with multiple and contradictory role expectations. Failing may cause the problem of role conflict among employees and generate the perception that all employees including managers are only after their self interests which is known as perception of politics (Madison et al., 1980).

In the view of this, following hypothesis is developed. Despite the fact that there exist insufficient empirical evidences on the effects of role conflict on perception of politics, still the role conflict is hypothesized as a strong predictor towards perception of politics in the view of different culture and socioeconomic environment of Pakistan:

H3: *Role conflict has positive affect on perception of politics.*

**Personality Factor.**

**Machiavellianism.** Machiavellianism construct is derived from the philosophy, doctrines, ruling principles and thoughts of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) a famous Italian political and military theorist. After studying and careful examination of the thoughts of Niccolo Machiavelli and some other leaders, Christie and Geis (1970) coined the term Machiavellianism as a personality trait based on cynical view towards others. Machiavelli persons are exploitive by nature and use others for their personal gains disregarding any empathy and compassion (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Machiavellian (high on Machiavellianism) are normally deceitful, cunning and aloof in nature and use various interpersonal strategies like deception, manipulation and exploitation to secure their benefits (McHoskey, Worzel and Szyarto, 1998).

Using others for their own success is their key attribute (Chen, 2010). Political behavior is also defined in terms of self-centered and self-interest maximizing behavior at the cost of others or at the cost of collective organizational goals (Ferris et al., 1989). This relatedness motivated various researchers of organizational behavior and psychology to investigate the association between these two. Various evidences are available where Machiavellianism has been found as key parsimonious variable in predicting actual political behavior and perception of politics (Ferris et al., 1989; Valle and Perrewe, 2000). Biberman (1985) was the first to establish positive relationship between Machiavellianism and perception of politics. Later Ferris et al. (1989) incorporated Machiavellianism as the key personal factor influencing perception of politics in their famous model of organizational politics perceptions. The following era also observed various evidences where Machiavellianism was found influential in explaining perception of politics. Mudrack (1993), Valle and Perrewe (2000) and O'Connor and Morrison (2001) confirmed the pivotal role of Machiavellianism construct for organizational politics and politics perception.

The study of Ferris et al. (2002) is also important in this regard, with their comparative analysis of different researches, both theoretical and empirical, highlighting politics within organization. Findings showed that past researches on organizational politics carry fragmented and inconsistent results. Only Machiavellianism emerged as a common predictor of politics perception. It was also endorsed by Stepanski, Kershaw and Arkakelian (2000) in their meta-analytical review. These results helped to develop the following hypothesis:

H3: *Machiavellian perceives work environment as more politicized.*

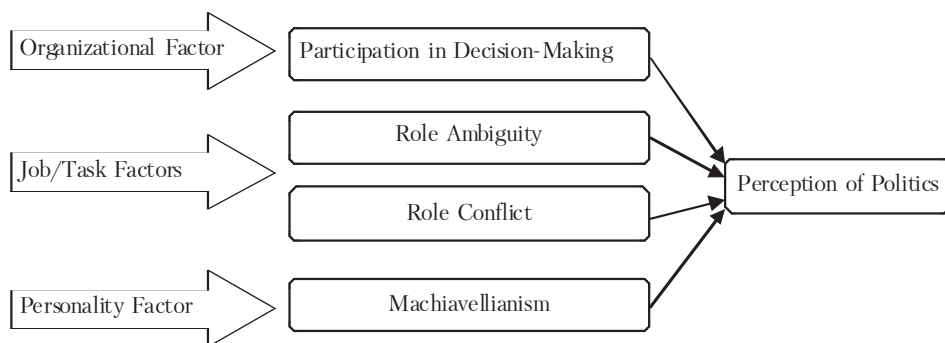


Figure 1. **Research Model**

### Methodology.

**Subjects/Sample.** The main purpose of the study was to know the causes of perceived politics in public sector organizations of Pakistan. Most of public organizations working under the direct control of federal government are located in the capital city (Islamabad), therefore this study is limited geographically and organizations working within the vicinity of Islamabad were considered for data collection. Since perception of politics is a common phenomenon and anyone working in an organization may feel the presence of politics therefore, employees working at various hierarchical levels constituted the population of the study.

**Procedures.** This study employed questionnaire survey therefore, employees were randomly approached through email, surface mail and even self-administered efforts. The questionnaire contained a cover letter explaining the purpose of the research and the confidentiality measures to uphold the anonymity of their responses. A postage paid envelope was also enclosed to mailed questionnaires. The respondents were asked to complete the form, seal and return the questionnaires within 15 days. In total, more than 300 questionnaire were floated using various approaches. Initially response rate was very low, therefore with the help of consistent follow-up and reminder letters, around 124 questionnaires were received back. Ultimately 112 usable questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 15.0, giving the 32% response rate.

**Measures.** This study utilized previously tested questionnaire and all the variables were measured on the five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), except participation in decision-making ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

**Table 1. Measures Detail**

Variables	Sources	Originally Developed	Items
Participation in Decision-Making	Vigoda and Cohen (2002)	Aiken and Hage (1968)	4
Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity	Muliawan, Green and Robb (2009)	Rizzo et al. (1970)	4 + 4
Machiavellianism	Valentine and Fleischman (2003)	Christie and Geis (1970)	5
Perceptions of Organizational Politics	Kacmar and Carlson (1997)	Kacmar and Ferris's (1991)	12
<b>Total Items</b>			<b>29</b>

**Analysis and results:** Descriptive statistics, and Cronbach's alpha ratios, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The following tables reveal the results obtained.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Results**

	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5
1	MACH	3.41	0.69	(0.60)				
2	PDM	2.23	0.57	-0.52**	(0.62)			
3	Role Conflict	3.33	0.84	0.59**	-0.54	(0.80)		
4	Role Ambiguity	3.43	0.86	0.64**	-0.57	0.68	(0.79)	
5	Perceived Politics	3.45	0.66	0.63**	-0.55	0.64	0.74	(0.86)

\* p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \*\*\* p < 0.001. Reliability estimates in parentheses.

**Table 3. Regression Results**

Variables	Perception of Politics	
	B	t
MACH	0.19**	2.31
PDM	- 0.14	- 1.53
Role Conflict	0.13	1.16
Role Ambiguity	0.33***	4.69
R	0.78	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.61	
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.60	
F	42.31***	

\* p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \*\*\* p < 0.001.

Note: n = 112. All coefficients are significant, except PDM and role conflict.

**Discussion.** Based on Hofstede (1980, 1991, 1993) argument that theories and research findings on one country cannot be generalized to others disregarding the



cultural dimensions of two countries. Therefore, the influence of participation in decision-making, role ambiguity, role conflict and Machiavellianism were investigated on perceived politics given their significant effects reported in developed countries (Parker, Dipboye and Jackson, 1995; Poon, 2003; O'Connor and Morrison, 2001).

Role ambiguity was found to be the most striking variable impinging upon perception of politics among all other explanatory variables (H2 accepted). This finding validated the previous researches which show the significant impact of role ambiguity towards perception of politics (Muhammad, 2007; Poon, 2003; Ashforth and Lee, 1990). This emphasizes managers to establish clear roles, responsibilities and procedures for employees and eliminate any ambiguity and uncertainties in the working environment. Ashforth and Lee (1990) suggested that organizations should formulate rules, procedures and practices in line with organizational policies and intents to avoid any equivocality. This would help to control the perception of politics.

Role conflict lacked any significant impact on perception of politics. Role conflict refers to the incompatibility of demands to an individual (Ilgen and Hollenbeck, 1991) which lack is not been given importance for its effects towards organizational politics. Andrew and Kacmar (2001) claimed that employees having the perceptions about employees involvement in self-serving behavior do not have any link to individual job responsibilities.

Machiavellianism was considered as the personality factors, having significant relationship with the perception of politics. Strong positive relationship had been reported between these two in various previous researches (Biberman, 1985; Valle and Perrew, 2000; Poon, 2003; O'Connor and Morrison, 2001). Ferris et al. (1989) also specified Machiavellianism as the key personal influence upon the perception of politics in his widely known organizational politics perceptions. As hypothesized (H1), Machiavellianism showed strong influence upon perception of politics. This is aligned with the meta-analytical view of Stepanski, Kershaw and Arkakelian (2000). This study confirms the notion of Sussman (2002) who claimed that Machiavelli personalities can exercise any kind of political tactics which may range from simple deception to drastically damaging other image.

Participation in decision making was considered as one of organizational factor in predicting perception of politics. Previous researches show strong negative relationship between participation in decision making and perception of politics (Parker, Dipboye and Jackson, 1995; Vigoda, 2001). Participation in decision-making shows significant negative relationship with perception of politics. However, in contrast to our assumption participation in decision making could not show strong effects on perception of politics. These findings are similar to the results of Vigoda and Cohen (2002) and Kacmer et al. (1999). Usually, employees may involve in more political activities when they are given involvement in decision-making (Sobel, 1993).

**Conclusion.** This study contributes to the existing body of organizational politics literature with the evidences observed in a developing country (Pakistan). Role ambiguity and Machiavellianism was proved to be significant for perception of politics. While participation in decision-making and role conflict couldn't show any significant impact on perception of politics. Therefore:

- managers should clearly define the responsibilities of each individual, so that employees have clear understanding of their roles at a workplace;

- since Machiavelli personalities have more likelihood to be involved in organizational politics as well perceive the prevalence of politics, managers should avoid hiring such individuals in the best interest of any organization. They may put their efforts to know the Mach tendencies at selection phase with the help of questionnaires/instruments (Mach-IV & V Scale by Christie and Geis, 1970) developed for this very purpose.

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