

## INNOVATIONS

### **Organizational Politics and Organizational Commitment: The Mediating Role of Work engagement**

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#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of organisational politics on employee organisational commitment and how work engagement mediates this relationship. A survey of 390 commercial bank employees in Ethiopia's Amhara region was used to collect data for the study. Structural equation modelling techniques were used to examine the results. The findings suggest that perceptions of organisational politics have a negative and significant effect on organisational commitment. Furthermore, the outcomes of this study revealed a negative and significant association between perceptions of organisational politics and work engagement. Work engagement and organisational commitment were also found to have a positive and significant relationship in this study. The results of this study found that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and employee organizational commitment.

**Key words:** 1. organizational politics 2. work engagement 3. organizational commitment

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#### **1. Introduction**

Organizational politics can be defined as behaviour aimed at defending an individual's self-interest at the expense of another (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010; Latif et al., 2011), and this behaviour frequently contradicts organisational goals (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Despite the fact that organizational politics can be beneficial, most academics and practitioners agree that a politically motivated workplace produces widespread harm (Kiewitz et al., 2009). Single studies and meta-analyses corroborate the prevalent view of political perceptions as a strain-inducing stressor (LePine et al., 2005), that is both divisive and pejorative (Chang et al., 2009a). Perceived organisational politics, according to Gallagher and Laird (2008), is the degree to which individuals perceive their work environment as supporting the self-interests of others, and thus as unjust and unfair from an individual standpoint.

When it comes to an organization's efforts to maintain its existence, one of the most important aims is organisational commitment (Yavuz, 2010). As such, organizational commitment is the level of loyalty an employee feels towards her/his employer or their employing organization whenever their level of commitment is high. According to Demirel and Goc (2013), employees with a higher level of organisational commitment are more productive, compatible, loyal to their work, have more responsibility and happiness, and hence cost less to the company.

Theoretically there is a strong association between organisational politics and organisational commitment (Vigoda, 2000). Employees' reliance on the organisation and responsibility to the organisation were likely to be damaged in an environment where they sensed organisational politics. Thus, perception of organizational politics may harm employees' organizational commitment (Rong and Cao, 2015).

Atta et al., (2012) studied effect organizational politics on organizational commitment and found out a significant negative direct effect for organizational politics on organizational commitment. In their study, Utami A., Bangun Y., and Lantu D. (2014) discovered a significant negative relationship between perception of organizational politics and organizational commitment.

Using a theoretical method of research Rong and Cao (2015), indicated that the perception of organizational politics will harm employees' work engagements by decreasing their organizational commitment. Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of organizational politics on organizational commitment and how this relationship is mediated by work engagement in the banking industry.

## **2. Literature reviews and Hypotheses**

### **2.1 Perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment**

Organizational politics, whether perceived or actual, has long been regarded to have serious and long-term negative consequences for workers (Miller et al., 2008). High levels of organizational politics relate to a lack of transparency and therefore have negative implications for employees' commitment to their own organization, on their work motivation, and subsequently on their performance (Chang et al, 2012).

Politically charged environment, in which employees face favouritism and unjust attitude, affects the commitment level of the employees (Zivnuska, Kacmar, Witt, Carlson & Bratton, 2004). Employees also consider such environment as threatening and as a result employees have to experience negative job outcomes such as declining organizational commitment (Hochwarter, Allen, & Ferris, 2014).

Previous researches supported and validated the strong opposite relationship between perception of politics and organizational commitment. For example, Miller et al., (2008) concluded strong negative relationship between perception of politics and organizational commitment. The same result was also reported by Vigoda (2000) which implied that when employees perceived high politics in their organization then it negatively affected their emotional attachment with the organization; that is organizational commitment. Thus, in this study it is hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of organizational politics negatively affects employee organizational commitment*

## **2.2 Perceived organizational politics and work engagement**

Engagement, according to Schaufeli et al. (2002), is defined as a "positive, satisfying, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). Vigour refers to the feeling of physical energy, willingness to invest efforts, emotional strength, and endurance of difficulties. Dedication on the other hand, involves a sense of "significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (p. 74). Finally, absorption refers to one's state of being completely concentrated and highly engrossed in work so that time seems to pass quickly; such a worker has difficulty detaching from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Engaged employees can be described as a person who are highly energised and resilient in their job performance; put their heart and soul into their jobs with persistence and willingness to put in effort; exhibit strong work involvement along with feelings of significance, passion, pride, inspiration, enthusiasm, excitement, and challenge from their work; and fully concentrate and immerse themselves in their work without noticing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

The availability of stressful and demanding situations makes employees become uncomfortable, leading to negative experiences in the workplace (Christian et al., 2011). That is, stressful and demanding situations mitigate employees' work engagement (Coetzee and De Villiers, 2010). In organizations that are regarded to be political, performance criteria and reward structures are uncertain and confusing (Rosen et al., 2006). Employees are more vulnerable to losing resources than gaining resources as a result of favouritism, unfair awards, and promotions. Employees are incentivized to save resources by withdrawing from roles under such instances (Kahn, 1990).

In their meta-analytic study, Crawford et al., (2010) extend the job-demand resource (JD-R) model by differentiating the type of demand that may mask the relationship with work engagement. Such a differentiation is based on the precepts of the transactional theory of stress. Specifically, the transactional theory of stress contends that individuals appraise stressful situations or job demands whether they are challenging or threatening (Crawford et al., 2010). Likewise, Cavanaugh et al., (2000) differentiated job demands as challenge and hindrance stressors. Crawford et al., (2010) discuss that challenges (e.g. time urgency) can be appraised as stressful demands that may potentially boost mastery and personal growth, while hindrances (e.g. role conflict, organizational politics) can be appraised as stressful demands that may potentially inhibit personal growth and learning and development. Therefore, challenge demands can foster work engagement, while hindrance demands can reduce work engagement. Studies show that (Crawford et al., 2010; Karatepe, 2013), perceptions of organizational politics have a negative relationship with work engagement. Hence, in this study it is hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of organizational politics negatively affects work engagement*

## **2.3 Work engagement and organizational commitment**

Obligations are created by a sequence of exchanges between persons who are in a position of reciprocal interdependence, according to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Employees, for example, feel obligated to return in kind and repay their supervisor or organisation when they get money or social resources from them (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees with high

levels of engagement, which stem from positive experiences at work, attribute these experiences to the organization. Thus, having previously received benefits from the organization and feeling obligated by the rule of exchange to repay them, such engaged employees feel indebted and reciprocate in some form. Employees who are engaged are more likely to be dedicated to their organization (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

To the extent that positive experiences can be attributed to the efforts of an organization, employees reciprocate with increased affective organizational commitment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Similarly, because engaged employees believe that the organization has helped them achieve their goals through providing resources they needed, they are more likely to feel indebted to the organization; subsequently, engaged employees are more willing to dedicate their efforts to their organization, a component of affective organizational commitment (Houkes, Janssen, De Jonge, & Nijhuis, 2001). Supporting these assumptions, Saks' (2006) study showed that engaged employees maintain a mutual exchange relationship with their organization based on mutual trust, loyalty, and commitment; and as such favourable reciprocal exchanges continue in the relationship, engaged employees tend to trust their organization more, possessing strong affective ties to the organization. In the same vein, Cohen (1999) argued that individuals who are involved in their job have positive work experiences which are attributed to the organization. Therefore, in this study it is hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 3: Work engagement positively affects employee organizational commitment*

#### **2.4 Mediating role of work engagement**

Despite the obvious relationships between views of organisational politics and job outcomes (Miller et al., 2008), it appears that unfair working conditions and treatment of employees lower work engagement and indirectly influence job outcomes via work engagement. Accordingly, taking motivation from the job-demand resource model (JD-R), work engagement is a mediator (Agarwal et al., 2012; Agarwal and Bhargava, 2014; Saks, 2006) regarding the relationship between work environment and employee outcomes.

The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) divides the workplace into two categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands are the parts of a job that require prolonged physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive and emotional) effort and are associated with physiological and/or psychological expenses. Emotional tiredness is positively associated to high job demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Physical, psychological, social, and organisational characteristics of a job that meet work goals and minimise working demands, and are associated with physiological and psychological expenses, or drive personal growth and development, are referred to as job resources. Job resources, according to the JD-R model, promote a motivational process that leads to high engagement, which is linked to organisational results through engagement. Similarly, high job demands cause demotivation, which is linked to poor organisational outcomes through low engagement (Hobfoll, 2001).

Employees' perceptions of political work environments can be thought of as a job demand that causes emotional strain, which in turn causes demotivation through impeding employee work engagement (Coetsee and Schreuder, 2010). Low employee engagement in turn affects organizational commitment negatively. Hence, in this study it is hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 4: Work engagement mediates the relationship between organizational politics and employee organizational commitment*

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Sample and data collection

The study's target population is employees of public and private commercial banks in three major cities in the Amhara national regional state, namely Bahir Dar, Dessie, and Gonder. Based on the recommendation of Stevens (1996), the sample size required for this study was 390 (26 measured variables x 15 observations for each variable). Stratified and simple random sampling was used to choose a representative sample from the target population. Data were collected by self-administered close-ended questionnaires.

#### 3.2 Measures

**Perceptions of organizational politics:** 12 items designed by Kacmar and Ferrisn, (1991) were used to assess perceptions of organisational politics. Items were rated on five-point scales ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). A sample item includes "There has always been an influential group in this department that no one ever crosses."

**Organizational commitment:** A shortened version of Mowday et al.'s (1979) measure of organisational commitment was used to measure organisational commitment. Response items were rated on five-point scales ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). A sample item includes "I really care about the future of this bank."

**Work engagement:** Work engagement was measured with nine items using the shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Responses items were scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 7 (always) to 1 (never). Higher scores indicated higher work engagement. An example item is "I am enthusiastic about my job."

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Sample characteristics

Males accounted for 82.1 percent of respondents, with females accounted for only 17.9 percent. The majority of the sample respondents 325 (83.3%) have a first degree, while 65 (16.7%) have a second degree. From the total respondents, 47 (12.1%) respondents have experience of 10 or more years, 161 (41.3%) of the respondents have from 7 to 9 years of experience, 145 (37.2%) of the respondents fall under the range of 4-6 years of experience, 30 (7.7%) of the respondents fall under the range of 1-3 years of experience, and only 7 (1.8%) of the respondents served less than a year.

#### 4.2 Measurement model results

The measurement model's reliability and validity were assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The results of CFA revealed the goodness-of-fit of the model:  $\chi^2 / df = 2.96$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.94, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.93, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.94 and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.07. To test the inter-item reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values were calculated, they equaled 0.91, 0.84 and 0.87 for

organizational politics, work engagement, and organizational commitment, respectively. All of which exceeded the suggested criteria of 0.70. To determine the reliability of the four constructs their composite reliabilities (CR) were extracted. These ranged from 0.85 to 0.94, exceeding the prescribed criterion of 0.6 and above (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). To evaluate the construct validity, the convergent and discriminant validities were each examined (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

**Table 4.1 Reliability and validity of the constructs**

Constructs	CR	AVE	1	2	3
1. Work engagement	0.94	0.69	<b>0.83</b>		
2. Organizational politics	0.91	0.60	0.34***	<b>0.78</b>	
3. Organizational commitment	0.85	0.53	0.57***	0.39***	<b>0.73</b>

*Notes: Average variances extracted (AVE) are on the diagonal (in bold); squared correlations are off-diagonal. The AVEs for each construct are far greater than the corresponding inter-construct square correlations, thereby supporting discriminant validity.\*\*\* denotes correlation significant at 1% significance level*

Regarding convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was examined. These were all found to be above 0.5 (Table 4.1), indicating convergent validity (Khan et al., 2016). While for discriminant validity, the AVE values for each construct are compared with the squared individual inter-construct correlations, as depicted in Table 4.1 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). It emerged that all the AVE values were greater than the square of each inter-construct correlation; thereby satisfying the criteria for discriminant validity. Each item has a factor loading greater than 0.6 and ranging between 0.62 and 0.93, consistent with Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) suggestions. Therefore, the indicator variables of this study have good convergent validity.

**4.3 Structural equation modelling and hypotheses testing**

The causal relationships between variables that are hypothesized in this study were investigated using structural equation modelling. This was done through the estimation of separate structural models in Amos 26 to test the direct and mediating relationships. The estimates for the test of direct relationships are presented in Table 4.2. These capture the findings of the tests for hypothesis 1, hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3. As can be observed from Table 4.2, all the hypotheses were supported (H1, H2, H3). Organizational politics was found to have a significant negative effect on organisational commitment ( $\beta = -0.20, p < 0.001$ ) and work engagement ( $\beta = -0.31, p < 0.001$ ). Work engagement, on the other hand, was found to have a significant positive influence on organisational commitment ( $\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$ ). Overall, the model fits well,  $\chi^2 / df = 2.96 (p < 0.001)$ , incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.94, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.93, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.94 and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.07.

**Table 4.2 Direct path analysis**

Hypothesis	Path description	$\beta$	t-value	Decision
Hypothesis 1	Organizational politics → organizational commitment	-0.20	-4.61***	Supported
Hypothesis 2	Organizational politics → work engagement	-0.31	-6.51***	Supported
Hypothesis 3	Work engagement → organizational commitment	0.46	10.52***	Supported

**Note:** \*\*\* denotes for significant at 1% significance level

#### 4.4 Mediation analysis

A mediation analysis was subsequently conducted using a bootstrap sample of 2,000. Table 4.3 highlights the outcome of this analysis, indicating the presence of a partial mediation relationship. As it can be observed from Table 4.3 organizational politics affects organizational commitment through work engagement, and the direct path from organizational politics to organizational commitment, as well as the indirect path through work engagement, were both found to be significant, thereby demonstrating that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between organizational politics and organizational commitment. Thus, providing support for hypothesis 4. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous researchers, such as Saks (2006), who emphasise the role of work engagement as a mediator in organisational politics and organisational commitment relationships.

**Table 4.3 Results of mediation analysis**

Relationship	Hypothesis	Direct without mediator	Direct with mediator	Indirect effect	Mediation
Organizational politics → work engagement → organizational commitment	Hypothesis 4	0.35(***)	0.20(***)	***	Partial mediation

**Note:** \*\*\* denotes for significant at 1% significance level

#### 5. Discussions

This study is designed to investigate the effect of organizational politics on employee organizational commitment and how this relationship is mediated by work engagement in the banking industry. The results show that perceptions of organizational politics have a significant and negative impact on employee organizational commitment. This implies that the higher the perceptions of organizational politics the lower will be the commitment of employees to their organization. In line with the results of this research, in their study Atta et al., (2012) investigated the effect organizational politics on organizational commitment and they discovered a significant negative effect of organizational politics on organizational commitment.

Moreover, the findings of this study revealed negative and significant relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and work engagement. This suggests that the presence of more perceptions of organizational politics results in lower work engagement. In line with this, Crawford et al., (2010) in their study discovered that perceptions of organizational politics have a negative relationship with work engagement. Furthermore, this study revealed a positive and significant relationship between work engagement and organizational commitment. This suggests that employees who are engaged in their jobs also are likely to be committed to their employing organizations. The results of this study indicated that the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and organizational commitment is partially mediated by work engagement. This implies that employees who work in a politically sensitive workplace experience negative feelings that impede their own growth, learning, and development. In this situation, their perceptions of organizational politics contribute to lower work engagement, which in turn leads to lower organizational commitment.

The results of this study showed negative and significant relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and employee organizational commitment. Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that working in a politically charged setting lowers employee engagement. Therefore, it is critical that bank management devote significant resources to creating and sustaining a work environment that is as fair and equitable as possible.

In this study only organisational commitment was studied as a job outcome variable; future research may expand the number of variables. For future research, possible work outcome variables such as job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intention can be considered.

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