

Political Skills and Professional Commitment Among Employees of Public and Private Sector Organisations

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Political skill is characterized by social perceptiveness and the ability to adjust one's behaviour to different and changing situational needs, to influence others. Politically skilled individuals enjoy a sense of personal security that allows them to perceive control over the processes and outcomes of interpersonal interactions within organisations. This enhances the sense of belonging and helps to improve business performance, personal commitment and motivation. There is, to date, little research concerning the relationship between political skill and professional commitment. Therefore, the present study intended to examine the propositions dealing with the political skill and professional commitment among the employees of public and private sector organisations. The study was conducted on 30 supervisory-level employees of two different sector organisations based in Delhi/NCR. Political Skill Inventory was administered on the employees for assessing their political skill and Professional Commitment Scale was administered on the same sample for assessing their level of professional commitment. The finding of the research indicated that in the public sector organisation, a higher level of political skill was found among the employees and they also scored higher on professional commitment, whereas private sector employees scored low on political skill and professional commitment. However, an indirect significant relationship between the scores of political skills and professional commitment levels was found for both types of organisations.

Keywords: Political Skill, Professional Commitment, Motivation, Organisation

Research suggests that political behaviour has both positive and negative implications for an organisation. Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar and Ferris (2005) found that employees who use political behaviour at work experienced a high degree of emotional labour, but this relationship operated in a different way in political skills. Employees who are low in political skills face emotional labour as a consequence, but emotional reactions from political behaviour were neutralized for those who are high on political skills.

Politics is an important variable in organisational research, which takes the attention of organisational psychologists and is studied with different perspectives in the organisation (Sowmya & Panchanatham, 2011). Over two decades ago, Pfeffer (1981) argued for a political perspective on organisations that introduced "political skill" as a critical competency for

effectiveness in the ambiguous and often-turbulent environments of political organisations. Mintzberg (1983, 1985) also coined the term "political skill" and suggested that organisations could be characterized as political arenas, and for survival and success in such work settings, the possession of "political will and political skill" is required. Mintzberg made reference to political skill as the workout of influencing others for using negotiation, manipulation and persuasion as per their interests. Organisational politics is built by leading intra-organisational persuasion tactics used by its members to endorse self-interests; this is associated with power, struggles and conflicts over the sources of power, influence and planned and directed attempts to actualise warring interests in the workplace (Vigoda, 2003; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pondy, 1989). A politically oriented manager might use the performance evaluation

system for self-promotion or to show favouritism to a delicate friend.

Political Skill

Political skills are essential career competencies that become more important as one ascends the corporate ladder. Ferris and his colleagues (2000) have developed a multi-dimensional conceptualisation and measure of political skill that identifies and assesses four key dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability and sincerity. People with social astuteness can accurately perceive and understand social situations as well as the personal interactions that occur in these settings. Individuals who have political skill are excellent observers of others' behaviours and are attuned to subtle differences in social situations. Individuals with strong interpersonal influence competencies have the ability to adapt their behaviour to each social situation in order to elicit a particular response from others. Politically skilled individuals have a personal style that has a powerful influence on others around them.

Individuals with political skills are adopting at identifying and developing diverse contacts and networks of the people. People in these networks tend to hold assets seen as valuable and necessary for successful personal and organisational gains. Because of their typical subtle style, politically skilled individuals easily develop friendships and build beneficial alliances and collisions. Furthermore, because social networks are deliberately constructed structures, individuals high in networking ability ensure they are well positioned in order to both create and take advantage of opportunities (Pfeffer, 1992).

Professional Commitment

The psychological bond between an employee and the focus of the employee's commitment (organisation, profession and team) assumes three quite distinct forms, each of which requires a distinguishing label and has different antecedents (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Most researchers treat professional commitment as a one-dimensional construct that can be easily measured by adopting well-established measures of organisational commitment. Professional

commitment is the relative strength of identification with and involvement in a profession. Professional commitment entails (1) a belief in and acceptance of the goals and values of the profession, (2) a willingness to exert effort on its behalf and (3) a desire to maintain membership in the profession (Aranya & Ferris, 1984; Aranya, Pollock, & Amernic, 1981). Professional commitment is conceptualized in the extant research as a process of socialisation into the profession (Larson, 1977).

The employer's attachment and commitment are related not only to the organisation but also to other fields, such as profession, family and direct supervisor. Two important aspects of commitment are organisational and professional commitment. These two aspects have been and are being discussed and studied by managerial and organisational behaviour researchers during recent decades (Abtahi & Molaei, 2004). The interest in professional commitment developed as researchers and practitioners began exploring the positive impact of having employees who are highly committed to their profession (Hall, Smith & Smith, 2005).

Lee, Buck and Midgley (1992) identify four reasons for understanding PC. First, a person's career represents a major focus in life. Second, because PC affects retention, it has important implications for human resource management. Third, because professional expertise develops from work experience, work performance may be linked to PC. Finally, future study of personal commitment may lead to an understanding of how individuals develop and integrate multiple commitments inside and outside the workplace.

Researchers such as Blau and Scott (1962), Hall (1968), Howser (1962) and Goldner (1957) say that there is a conflict between organisational and professional commitment. Based on their views, professional employees, as they claim, are more committed to their profession and its values rather than to their organisation and employers. Goldner suggested the probability of conflict in the employee's commitment to their organisations and profession for the first time. He stated that professionals commit to an extra organisational reference, such as their professional group,

instead of committing to their organisation. On the other hand, employees with limited skills and knowledge commit to the organisation and have an internal reference (Abtahi & Molaei, 2007). Recent research has explored this potential organisational-professional conflict and found that commitment is not a zero sum game (Bryant, Moshavi & Nguyen, 2007).

Keeping in view the growing awareness of political skills among the employees of public and private sector organisations, the present study was undertaken to examine the level of political skill among supervisory level employees of two different organisations and its probable impact on the professional commitment among them. The following hypotheses were formulated in light of available literature:

1. There would be a significant difference between public sector and private sector organisation employees on political skills (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability and apparent sincerity).

2. There would be a significant difference between public sector and private sector organisation employees on professional commitment (affective, continuance and normative occupational commitment).

3. There would be a significant relationship between political skills (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability and apparent sincerity) and professional commitment (affective, continuance and normative occupational commitment) of employees of public and private sector organisations.

Method

Sample:

Thirty supervisory-level male employees were purposively taken from a "Petroleum Company" as a public sector organisation, and "Power Corporation Limited" as a private sector organisation for comparison between the employees of the two sectors.

Measures:

Political Skill Inventory (PSI) by Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky and Hochwarter's (2005): It was used to assess political skill and its

dimensions. Specifically, the scale contains four dimensions, including social astuteness (five items), interpersonal influence (four items), networking ability (six items), and apparent sincerity (three items). Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement about themselves using a 7-point Likert scale. The coefficient alphas for each of the four PSI dimensions were .85 for social astuteness, .88 for interpersonal influence, .87 for networking ability and .87 for apparent sincerity.

Professional commitment among the employees was measured by Meyer et al.'s (1993) questionnaire, which consists of 18 items. It consists of three scales, measuring affective, normative and continuance commitment, each containing six statements. Responses to these items were on 7-point scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The coefficient alphas for these scales ranged from .73 to .87.

Procedure:

The supervisory grade employees in each sector of the organisation were personally contacted by the authors in their free time, who explained the purpose of the study to each employee. The verbal consent of the employees was also taken before giving them the questionnaires.

Results

Table 1. Means, SDs and t-values of political skill scores for the employees of the public sector (n=30) and the private sector (n=30) organisations.

	Groups	Mean	SD	t-value
Social Astuteness	Pub.	27.6	2.22	5.00**
	Pvt.	24.46	2.6	
Interpersonal Influence	Pub.	23.63	1.71	7.31**
	Pvt.	19.2	2.84	
Networking Ability	Pub.	29.13	3.77	6.31**
	Pvt.	24	2.36	
Apparent Sincerity	Pub.	14.73	2.57	1.63
	Pvt.	13.83	1.57	
PSTOTAL	Pub.	95.1	5.9	10.63**
	Pvt.	81.5	3.76	

** $p < .01$, * $p < .005$

The results given in Table 1 show that the value of “t” is significant at 0.01 level, which indicates that the employees of the public sector have a higher degree of political skill than to the employees of the private sector, except for Apparent Sincerity. Hence, the hypothesis 1 is partially accepted.

Table 2. Means and SDs of professional commitment scores for the employees of the public sector (n = 30) and the private sector (n=30) organisations and t-values

Groups	Mean	SD	t-value
Affective Commt.	Pub. 30.53	5.1	6.57**
	Pvt. 23.5	2.94	
Continuance Commt.	Pub. 29.86	3.32	1.81
	Pvt. 28.23	3.65	
Normative Commt.	Pub. 28.26	2.79	0.836
	Pvt. 27.6	3.55	
PCTOTAL	Pub. 88.66	5.25	5.90**
	Pvt. 79.13	4.83	

**p < .01, *p < .005

Table 2 revealed the value of the “t” ratio is significant at the 0.01 level, which means that the professional commitment in the public sector employees is higher than that in the private sector employees in terms of Affective Commitment and PCTotal. Hence, hypothesis 2 is partially accepted.

It was apparent from the results presented in Table 3 that the overall relationship between the two variables was direct and significant as r = .44**, which was statistically significant beyond the .01 level. The dimension-wise analysis of the results also indicates more or less similar trends, though all correlation values are not significant. Hence, hypothesis 3 is partially accepted.

Discussion

Public sector refers to the establishment of an appropriate legal, economic and institutional environment that allows companies to thrive as institutions for advancing long-term shareholder value and maximum human-centred development while remaining conscious of their other responsibilities to stakeholders, the environment and society in general. Political skill is not only a positive set in itself; it leads to the acquisition of positive assets. Political skills give the individual a calm sense of self-confidence and personal security and builds social capital and social support, which in turn can increase their reputation and status. With the constant threat of layoff and corporate restructuring, the work environment is filled with ambiguity and constant change in both public and private sector organisations. Individuals who have political skills are socially astute, adapt to their current surroundings and adjust and re-regulate their behaviour (Ferris et al., 2005). Individuals with political skills are able to manage their employer’s perception in such a way that they appear to be similar to the employer, and thus reflect a good fit with the organisation, culture and workgroup. They are able to communicate with employers in a way that highlights their positive behaviour and downplays their negative behaviour, which affects their performance rating due to their ability to manage their image and likeability in the mind of the performance rater. Perrewe and Nelson (2004) suggest that because organisations are political arenas, political skill is essential to survival. The impact of politics (both formal and informal) may vary according to the sector in which the

Table 3. Correlation coefficients between political skills and professional commitment among public and private sector organisations.

	Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment	Total
Social Astuteness	.29*	0.24	0.01	.30**
Interpersonal Influence	.33**	0.12	0.25	.41**
Networking Ability	.32**	0.01	0.07	0.24
Apparent Sincerity	0.25	0.1	0.02	0.24
Total	.45**	0.19	0.06	.44**

**p < .01, *p < .005

organisation operates, the degree to which it has a high and visible public profile, the sensitivity of some of its activities and its accountability and governance structures. However, all organisations must take politics into account, and senior and strategic managers in particular must be sensitive to the interplay of politics with organisational purpose. In this view, public management is a structure of governance (Scott, 1998), that is, a constitutionally appropriate formalisation of managerial discretion intended to enable the government to affect the will of the people. A more pluralist view sees politics as a set of interactions within and between public and private institutions, covering both formal and informal activities.

In the twenty-first century, the global market scenario is changing drastically. An organisation, whether public or private, faces the problems of merges, acquisitions, globalisation of the economy, privatisation of institutions etc., which changes the diverse phenomena of organisational behaviour. Recently, recession affected the global market, which directly or indirectly influenced the employees of public and private organisations socially, economically and politically. The employees of the private sector face problems such as job cuts, low income, high retention, less productivity, low performance etc., which creates job insecurity and low income in the market, which is the most important factor of commitment to the profession. But, the phenomenon of the public services job security instead of low income employees are more committed to their organisation. Crewson (1997) found that high pay matters less to public than to private employees. Private sector reward systems typically are built on the primacy of extrinsic rewards and may "crowd out" the intrinsic rewards that motivate public sector employees. If public sector jobs are intrinsically more meaningful, public sector managers can use this advantage in motivating its work force (Perry & Wise, 1990).

Meyer and Allen (1997) define a committed employee as being one who "stays with an organization, attends work regularly, puts full day and more, protects corporate assets, and believes in the organizational goals". This employee positively contributes to the organisation because

of his/her commitment to the organisation. Studies examining different types of work sectors have found that government employees have higher levels of continuance commitment than other sectors (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Perry, 1997). This is due to the antecedents of public service motivation. Public sector employees have high levels of commitment to the organisation and its goals because it is argued that they are a different type of employee, with strong ethics as well as job security (Perry, 1997). Lio (1995) states "facing today's difficult times, many public employees appreciate the relatively secure job situation associated with public employment and consider it a major reason for their organisational commitment" (p.241).

Political skill is one of the most important competencies by which leaders can contribute to effectiveness in organisations. Interpersonal influence and networking ability or connection building at the workplace directly or indirectly affect's the job performance. Politically skilled individuals are more likely to successfully implement influence efforts and secure increased compensation. Frink and Ferris (1998) noted that individuals who set high goals tend to have a higher performance rating because they are able to transmit the impression of being ambitious, hardworking and committed. Treadway et al. (2004) found that political skill was positively related to the perception of organisational support and the leader's political skill might be an important factor in garnering support and commitment to the goals that are necessary for a team and organisation to be successful. Through political skills, any employee can increase his/her affective commitment towards his/her organisation. Affective commitment is emotional attachment with the organisation. A committed employee works for the organisation and gives his/her full efforts to his/her organisation. The loyal employee has a high level of effective commitment. High political skills will increase the organisational commitment of an employee (Treadway et al., 2004).

Limitation and Suggestion

Every study suffers from some limitations because of the limited time and resources at the

hands of the researcher. So, from this perspective, the present study too suffers from some limitations. This study is limited to only one public sector organisation and one private sector organisation in Delhi/NCR. The study is based on an urban sample. Some degree of generalisation can be made from this study about the urban population though the same cannot be said about employees working in rural and remote areas in the same organisation. The study was conducted on small sample size comprising managerial grade, mostly male, employees located in urban areas. It was not sufficient to get in-depth information with regards to the variables. Finally, on the basis of quantitative method, one cannot fully grasp the reality, so in case of further research, this method should be supplemented with some other qualitative methods.

Conclusion

On the basis of results, it can be concluded that the employees of urban public sector organisations were having a high level of political skill as well as professional commitment, whereas the employees of the urban private sector scored low on both political skill and professional commitment. As far as the association between political skills and professional commitment was concerned, an inverse relationships between the two variables was found for each group of samples.

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