Examining the Influence of Organizational Politics on Job Performance

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between organizational politics (OP) and job performance (JP). The study also determined the influence of organizational politics on job performance. Consequently the study examined which of the organizational politics aspect has significant impact on job performance. The multistage random sampling consisted of 349 civil servants were selected in Malaysian public organizations. The results revealed that organizational politics and its components were related negatively to job performance. It was found that two components of organizational politics mainly going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP) had significant influence on job performance. The going along to get ahead (GATGA) aspect of organizational politics appeared to be the most significant and important influence on job performance. Findings and implications for managerial practices from the study are discussed and put forward.

Key words: Organizational politics and job performance.

INTRODUCTION

Currently the business environment has change rapidly due to technology advancement, working environment and the emphasis on cost effectiveness. The rapid change in technologies, increasing globalization, shifting demographics and greater regulatory oversight are combining to create fundamental shifts in business environment that has led to new opportunities, challenges and risks for business managers. Therefore, as a more competitive market emerges, organizations are finding business that able to gain competitive advantage and to become market leaders. Thus organization operations have to be carried out in tandem with these current changes and global competition. In the current ever-dynamic marketplace, organizations are faced with continuous challenges ranging from hard (like technological) to soft (like behavioral) in nature. The complexity of business organization environments demands employees who are proactive, positive and avoid themselves from any negative related behaviors. This is because studies have suggested that negative behaviors will ultimately result in reduced organizational and employee job performance, specifically if they are linked with unhealthy elements such as organizational politics. This scenario is without exception in Malaysian public organizations.

In pursuit of economic expansion and to enhance the socio-economic condition of the citizens, the Malaysian public servants who work in Malaysian public sectors are left with no other option but to gain competitive advantage by ameliorating its efficiency. Malaysian civil servants have always been urged to improve their performance in order to be world class employees (Abdullah, 2006). This implies that in order to be in tandem with this goal, Malaysian civil servants need to manifest high job performance (JP) by acquiring the right values and behaviors. However, this can be threatened by the presence of factors such as organizational politics (OP) that have proven to be detrimental to the organization and job performance (Conner, 2006). Statement from Former Malaysian’s Prime Minister on little Napoleons (employees who misuse power in their favor) in public sector indicates the existence of organizational politics in public organization (Abdullah, 2006). According to Angelina (2007) there was a use of political tactics on Malaysian union leaders in impeding promotion. This scenario certainly will disrupt civil servants in carrying their enormous responsibilities in order to improve efficiency and overall job performance. Bryer (2006) stated that civil servants have to deal with multiple stockholders. This implies that citizens will suffer if Malaysian civil servants demonstrated poor performance.

Moreover poor performance leads to low efficiency that threatens large population and carries damage to the society (Vigoda, 2000). Due to this most organizations expect their employees to avoid in any negative related behaviors including organizational politics. Previous researches have concluded that organizational politics have significant influence on job performance (Chen and Fang, 2007).This research therefore attempted to answer the following questions among Malaysian civil servants: Whether there is a relationship between OP and JP? The extent of OP influences JP and which aspect of organizational politics has higher or more impact on JP?
Organizational politics (OP) has been one of the popular subjects in industrial or organizational psychology due to its impact on organizational outcomes such as job dissatisfaction (Poon, 2004), turnover intent (Harris et al., 2005), disloyalty and lowered perceived innovation (Parker et al., 1995) as well as lowered job performance (Byrne, 2005). However, it was not until the last twenty years that OP is discussed in earnest in the literature despite the rampancy of OP in the organizational settings.

Organizational politics has been defined and measured in several different ways due to diverse definitions and measures in the scholarly literature. In the early works like Allen et al., (1979), OP is defined as intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self interest of individuals or groups. Pettigrew (1973) defined OP as the use of power to influence decision making, while Pfeffer (1981) described OP as how power is used to resolve uncertainty and or dissent regarding organizational actions and objectives. Three political activities domain play key roles on organization mainly structural change, management succession and resource allocation (Daft, 2010). This suggests that organizational politics can be defined based on these three perspectives. Structural change or structural reorganization relates to power and authority relationship which will affect the underlying power base from strategies contingencies that leads to an explosion of political activity (Galbraith, 1977). Management succession refers to organizational changes such promotion, transfers and new hiring staff which according to Daft (2010) have great political impact especially at top management level in terms of network of trusts, cooperation and communication where uncertainty is high. Meanwhile resource allocation relates to decision made to determine required resources for organization performance such as salaries, operating budgets, employees, office facilities and equipment which require political processes to resolve dilemmas due to conflicts and disagreement (Daft, 2010). Pfeffer (1981) stated that organizational politics involves with activities to acquire, develop and use power and other resources to influence others as well as to obtain the desired outcome under uncertainty or disagreement of choices.

Despite of various definitions offered by scholars however according to Kacmar and Carlson (1997) the definitions of OP share common points in terms of: (a) political activities are a means of exercising social influence, (b) political behaviors are designed to promote or protect one’s self interests, (c) at least two parties with the potential to possess different interests must be involved. This study used the definition of OP as suggested by Cropanzano et al., (1995), which defined OP as social influence to those who can provide rewards that will help promote or protect the self-interests of the actor(s). This definition is also shared by Kacmar and Carlson (1997), Harris et al., (2005) and Daft (2010).

Much of the scholarly research in the field of organizational theory is originated from a quest to understand the antecedents and effects of organizational politics on individual productivity and job performance in workplace. Amongst the studies done in the domain of perceived OP, its linkage with work outcomes such as job performance has drawn the interests of few researchers (Aryee et al., 2004; Byrne, 2005; Chen and Fang, 2007; Zivnouska et al., 2004). However, despite the abundance of OP related research in the literature, the results are still far from generalizable due to the settings of the studies (Parker et al., 1995; Vigoda, 2007). This indicates that although several studies have been devoted to this topic the results have reported mixed findings. Some researchers report significant effect between OP and JP (Chen and Fang, 2007), while few others did not find any relationship (Aryee et al., 2004; Zivnouska et al., 2004). This, together with the pervasiveness and effects of OP in the workplace, makes further investigation still necessary (Poon, 2003). In addition researchers have suggested that further investigation need to be conducted on the antecedents of job performance (JP) on behavioral aspects such as organizational politics (Rosen et al., 2006). Due to this scenario and OP characteristics as an unavoidable construct in organizations therefore OP deserves more attention and further investigation (Byrne, 2005).

In the same vein, this paper attempted to examine the relationship between OP and JP, determines the contribution or influence of OP on JP and determines which of the OP’s aspect has highest impact on job performance. Furthermore, to date there are limited studies regarding OP done in Malaysia and none of them have attempted to test the relationship between OP and job performance among Malaysian civil servants. According to Parker (2007) research on the relationship between OP and job performance is deemed crucial as JP will directly impact organizational performance.

Organizational Politics and Job Performance:
Definition of job performance as a variable in empirical research and its acclaimed relevance in the field of industrial or organizational psychology (Sonnetag and Frese, 2002) differs across researchers. Viswesvaran (2001) attributes this dissimilarity to the characteristic of it being an abstract and latent construct with many manifestations - a notion supported by Motowidlo (2003). Performance is a multidimensional construct where different types of behaviors need to be considered in order to understand it (Aguinis, 2009). Literature has related employees’ performance in organization based on two perspectives namely task performance (TP) and contextual performance (Borman et al., 1997). Task performance refers to two activities mainly 1) activities that transform raw materials into goods and services in organization and 2) activities that help with the

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transformation process by for example providing planning, coordination and supervision to ensure organization efficiency and effectiveness (Casio and Aguinis, 2001). Accordingly skills and abilities are the two main factors that contribute to task performance.

Meanwhile contextual performance refers to behaviors that influence the effectiveness and efficiency of organization. Aguinis, (2009) suggested that good environment in which task performance can occur will help to achieve these goals. Additionally, personality is one of the important aspects that plays significant role in influencing contextual performance (CP). Among the characteristics of CP as suggested by Aguinis, (2009) are: 1) persisting with enthusiasm and exerting extra effort to complete task activities 2) volunteering to carry out task activities that are not formally part of the job, 3) helping and cooperating with others, 4) following organizational rules and procedures and 5) endorsing, supporting and defending organizational objectives.

Based on the above it can be concluded that both TP and CP are important especially in managing performance of employee in organization. Aguinis, (2009) supports that TP and CP is an important dimension of performance management system to ensure organization efficiency, effectiveness and performance.

This study focused the definition of JP based on two dimensions mainly task performance (TP) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). TP as defined by Borman and Motowidlo (1997) has five dimensions that include 1) job-specific task proficiency, 2) non-job-specific task proficiency, 3) written and oral communication proficiency, 4) supervision - in the case of a supervisory or leadership position and 5) management. In contrast to TP, Rotundo and Sackett (2002) and O’Brien and Allen (2008) suggested that voluntary behaviors that are deviant and damaging to the organizational goals which are considered in negative form are also as a part of employees’ performance construct. Such dysfunctional behaviors are generally labeled as counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). CWB refers to actions that adversely affect the well-being of the organization (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). Previous studies generally operationalized CWB based on negative perspective. However this study looks CWB as a positive contributor towards achievement of organizational goals. Therefore for the purpose of this study the construct of CWB has been reversed to make it in positive form. Thus the CWB construct in this study refers to positive behavior that could be linked with organizational politics (OP).

Deriving from the above notions the measures of JP in this study is based on TP and CWB constructs. Rotundo and Sackett (2002) assert that organizational performance is a result of accumulated individual performances. Hence, high organizational performance implies high level of job performance from each of its employees and vice versa. Job performance, on the other hand, has been proven to be affected by multitude of factors. Among these factors is OP, whereby empirical studies found that OP has negatively affects job performance (Kacmar et al., 1999; Ferris et al., 2002; Rosen et al., 2006). This simply means that the higher the level of OP will result in lower level of job performance and thus the lower the level of OP will mean the higher the job performance magnitude. Therefore, it is hypothesized that OP will be negatively related to JP. The proposed conceptual model of OP is depicted in Figure1. As depicted in Figure 1 organizational politics (OP) constitutes three components mainly GATGA (going along to get ahead), PPP (pay and promotion policies) and GPB (General political behavior) and job performance (JP) contains two aspects of TP and CWB.

![Fig. 1: A proposed conceptual framework of OP.](image)

**Purpose and Hypothesis of Study:**

The main purpose of this study was to empirically examine the relationship between organizational politics and its components or dimensions with job performance (JP). Consequently the study examined the influence of OP on JP. It also determined which aspect of OP that has higher impact or influence on JP among civil servant in Malaysia. Consequently this study sought to test the following hypotheses:
H1: There is a negative and significant relationship between general political behavior (GPB) and job performance.

H2: There is a negative and significant relationship between going along to get ahead (GATGA) and job performance.

H3: There is a negative and significant relationship between pay and promotion policies (PPP) and job performance.

H4: There is a negative and significant relationship between overall organizational politics (OP) and job performance.

H5: There is a significant influence of OP components (GPB, GATGA and PPP) on job performance.

H6: Going along to get ahead (GATGA) will have more impact than pay and promotion policies (PPP) on job performance.

H7: Going along to get ahead (GATGA) will be the most significant influence on job performance.

Methodology:

Sampling Procedure:
Data for this study was collected based on a multistage random sampling from 349 government civil servants in Malaysian public organizations. The response rate was 69.8% from the sample of 500 staff. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test and answer the hypotheses and objectives of the study. The self-administered questionnaires obtained were then analyzed using SPSS (Special Package for Social Sciences) version 16. Factor analysis was conducted on OP scale to compare the dimensionality of this scale in this sample as proposed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). From the preliminary analysis, it was found that the subjects to items ratio for this variable in the study were correlated with other item at least 0.5 or more in magnitude value and which is within the acceptable magnitude value.

Independent Variables:
The independent variables of this study were organizational politics (overall OP) and its components or dimensions of general political behavior (GPB); going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP). Organizational politics perceived by the respondents in this study were gauged using POPS (Organizational Politics Scale) which was adapted from an instrument developed by Kacmar and Carlson's (1997). The instrument which was used to measure OP contains 15 items. Items for each OP’s component are as follows: GPB (two items); GATGA (seven items); and PPP (six items). The items of this scale were measured using five-point Likert scale (with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Dependent Variable:
Job performance (JP) was the dependent variable of the study. JP was measured based on the combination of two components mainly task performance (TP) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The seven-item measures of task performance was adapted from Williams and Anderson’s (1991) based on the scale of 1 = never, 2 = hardly ever, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often. Meanwhile the nine-item counterproductive work behaviors questionnaire developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was adapted in the study. Respondents were given a five-point Likert scale of 1 = never, 2 = hardly ever, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, 5 = very often.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents’ Profile:
As tabulated in Table 1 Majority (68.2%) of the respondents are married and nearly one-third (30.4%) of respondents are single. Female made up 59.6% of the sample while 40.4% are male. The youngest respondent is 21 years old (one person) while the oldest of them are 56 years (four people). The age group that has the highest percentage is 30 - 39 years old with 37.8%, followed by below 30 years (34.9%). Slightly more than half of the respondents (52.4%) have Bachelor’s Degree as their highest level of academic qualification and 27.8% have at least obtained a Masters’ Degree.

Relationship Between GPB, GATGA, PPP and Overall OP with JP (H1, H2, H3 and H4):
Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations and alpha reliabilities of the variable measures in this study. The reliability analysis reveals that all scales are at the acceptable magnitude value of more than 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The coefficients value shown in Table 2 found that all of the hypothesized relationships were supported. Specifically the H1 which stated that general political behavior (GPB) would be negatively related to JP (job performance) is supported (beta = -.25. p<0.01). This is followed by variables of going along to get ahead (GATGA), pay and promotion policies (PPP) and overall OP indicated a negative and significant relationship with JP. The coefficient values of the variables are: GATGA (beta = -.33. p<0.01); PPP

(beta = -.25, p<0.01); and for overall OP (beta = -.38, p<0.01). The data provided support for the hypothesis H1, H2, H3 and H4, therefore these hypotheses were accepted.

Table 1: Background Characteristics of the Subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 30 Years old</td>
<td>35.10</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 30 Years old</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 40-50 Years old</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 50 Years old</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>141</td>
<td>40.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>208</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>238</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysian Certificate</td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Equivalent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other certificate</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>183</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Degree and Above</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities and correlation coefficients of the main variables in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.25*</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.35*</td>
<td>0.54*</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.46*</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>-0.38*</td>
<td>-0.25*</td>
<td>-0.33*</td>
<td>-0.25*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p <.05 (Alpha reliability values are shown in parenthesis on the diagonal).

1 = Overall OP.
2 = General political behavior (GPB).
3 = Going along to get ahead (GATGA).
4 = Pay and promotion policies (PPP) and
5 = job performance (JP).

**The Influence of GPB, GATGA and PPP on Job Performance (H5):**

The fifth hypothesis (H5) of the study was to determine the influence of organizational politics components (GPB, GATGA and PPP) on job performance. Table 3 depicts the multiple regression analysis to answer H5 of the study. From the multiple regression analysis in Table 3 it was found that on the components of OP have contributed significantly to JP. The R² value of 0.185 indicated that 18.5 percent of variance in job performance was explained by components of organizational politics (GPB, GATGA and PPP).

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of GPB, GATGA and PPP on Job performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>GPB</th>
<th>GATGA</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>AR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
<td>-0.263*</td>
<td>-0.127*</td>
<td>.185*</td>
<td>.129*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p <.005; GPB = general political behavior; GATGA = going along to get ahead; PPP = pay and promotion policies.

Examining each individual component of OP as tabulated in Table 3, the analysis however revealed that only two components mainly GATGA (β=-.263) and PPP’s (β=-.127) have contributed to job performance as they were significant at 0.5. Meanwhile component GPB (β=-.054) was not significant at 0.05. Data in Table 2 for the H5 did not provide full support for the hypothesis. Thus the H5 of this study was partially accepted. GATGA by a coefficient of - 0.263 and PPP with coefficient of -0.127 are said to predict organizational politics positively. The contribution or influence of organizational politics components on job performance is depicted in Figure 2.
The Impact OP components on Job Performance (H6) and (H7):

The following objective and hypothesis of the study was to examine which aspect of OP that has higher and significant impact on JP. Multiple regression analysis was employed to answer the sixth hypothesis (H6) in this study as depicted in Table 3. Prior to interpreting the results an inspection was carried out to detect the multicollinearity of the data. From the inter-item correlation results (as provided in Table 2), it can be seen that the correlations among the OP aspect of general political behavior (GPB), going along to get ahead (GATGA) and pay and promotion policies (PPP) are acceptable as they are less than .70 and within the acceptable values (Pallant, 2001). Based on the multiple regression analysis of OP components for job performance, it was found that only GATGA and PPP were found to be statistically significant contributor to the job performance equation as their beta values stand at p <.001. Meanwhile the beta value of GPB is larger than .05 as illustrated in Table 3 indicated of no significant influence to JP. As the beta coefficient of GATGA (β=-.263) is larger than PPP’s (β=-.127), it means that GATGA contributed most significantly to the job performance equation. This implied that GATGA has more impact than PPP on JP. Therefore H6 was accepted.

Examining on each beta value of organizational politics components: GATGA (β=-.263), PPP’s (β=-.127), GBP (β=-.054.), the study revealed that GATGA (β=-.263) indicated the highest value. This shows that GATGA emerged as the strongest and most significant influence in explaining job performance. The data proved that the H7 of the study is supported. Thus GATGA is the most important aspect in influencing job performance.

Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions:

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between OP components of general political behavior (GPB), going along to get ahead (GATGA), pay and promotion policies (PPP) and overall OP to job performance (JP). It also determined the influence of GPB, GATGA and PPP on Job performance. Consequently it investigated which aspect of OP that emerge as the most significant impact on JP. The study found that all components of OP and its components mainly GPB, GATGA and PPP were negatively and significantly related to JP. These results were consistent with previous studies (Aryee et al., 2004; Byrne, 2005; Chen and Fang, 2007; Zivnuska et al., 2004), therefore provide further evidence that OP has direct influences on the job performance among civil servants in Malaysia. This finding implies that leaders in Malaysian civil service should recognize the role of organizational politics that may subsequently harm the organization. Hence, measures must be taken to minimize perceptions of OP amongst the civil servants such as by providing clear and accurate performance assessments, empowering subordinates where possible, promoting workplace openness and fostering appropriate freedom of ideas. At macro level, effective communication must be adopted to minimize misinterpretations and adverse perceptions among employees.

The results indicated that GPB, GATGA and PPP have contributed about 18.5 percent of variance on JP. GPB however indicates no influence on JP. Only GATGA and PPP have an influence on JP. As predicted the study found that the GATGA component of OP has the highest contribution in explaining the variations of JP and appeared as the most important factor to JP. This finding implies that more efforts should be directed at minimizing the GATGA component if the organization aims at promoting JP in organization. This finding suggests that management should not take lightly the GATGA aspect as it would influence JP in workplace. Hence, GATGA could be considered as one of the potential variables to be integrated in OP studies or model and to be applied in management practices with improvements in the construct. This is the first issue dealt with in this study that has not been emphasized in earlier studies especially in Malaysian public organizations (Eastern context). Previous studies were regularly conducted in Western setting. The study revealed here
indicates that Western management and organizational theories could be valid in a non-Western setting and the findings found in a certain society might be evident in a different society.

The results of this study have shown a remarkable leading factor in assessing the OP outcomes of civil servants in Malaysia. Since the study was conducted in the public sector and based on cross sectional nature of study the external validity of the results may be somewhat limited. The study proposes that future research should consider experimental or longitudinal approach and other consideration in terms of subject and setting of the study. A longitudinal approach may help in improving one’s ability to make causal statements. Factors such as organizational, personal, occupational and cultural elements that may influence OP should be explored for further research. However, findings from this study serves as a departure for future studies of OP as it is an initiative towards a greater understanding of organizational attitudes and behaviors particularly on organizational politics and job performance in the global business and organization.

REFERENCES


