Review

A balanced treatment of perceived organizational politics: A review of the positive influences

Musa Nyathi

National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; musa.nyathi@nust.ac.zw

Abstract: Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to review literature in the area of perceived organizational politics (POPs) and to present a model that explains the positive role of the phenomenon in the workplace. This involves understanding how POPs have evolved from playing a much-publicized destructive role to an emerging constructive one. **Design/methodology/approach:** An integrative review method was used to review articles on POPs published over the last 13 years (2010–2022). The primary sources of information were several databases, such as ISI Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Scopus. Specific search terms were considered to find relevant articles, leading to 7803 articles (3894 hits on Scopus, 1723 hits on Google Scholar, and 2186 hits on Web of Science). These studies were further examined for their relevance to this study, and 103 articles were identified. The application of exclusion criteria funneled them to 66 studies. The articles, employing quantitative, mixed, and qualitative approaches were coded. The themes were subsequently determined. **Findings:** The review notes that the POPs literature emphasis is shifting from a negative and dysfunctional approach to one where positive organizational outcomes are possible. The review concludes that POPs have functional consequences too. The phenomenon could illuminate favorable workplace outcomes if viewed as an enhancer rather than a hindrance. POPs should be viewed as a phenomenon that for all purposes is essentially neutral. It is individuals who label the otherwise neutral construct as negative (negative POPs) or positive (positive POPs). **Practical implications:** The paper reveals how antecedents help organizational members label politics as positive. Perceived organizational politics is largely a neutral construct until the perceiver decides to label it otherwise. A positive perception of politics is significant in predicting important employee outcomes such as motivation, employee satisfaction, and job performance. Management needs to invest in antecedents and moderators to help employees label the construct as positive rather than negative. **Originality/value**: The study is an original review of the positive POPs literature to identify the significant antecedents, moderators, and work outcomes, vital to organizational success.

Keywords: perception of organizational politics; political behavior; organizational power and politics

1. Introduction

Organizations are political arenas in which their members need not only political skills and an appetite to work in such an environment but also to engage in political activities (Mintzberg, 1985). Politics is an organizational reality and participation in its activities denotes an acceptable and functional practice (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2011; Byrne et al., 2017). Organizational politics is not a concrete and objective concept. Employee behaviors are a response not to actual organizational politics (Chang et al., 2009) but to their perception of what they think organizational politics is like at the time. This study uses Richardsen, et al.'s (2016) definition of organizational politics

as 'an attitude that strategically escalates self-interest and challenges the combined organizational goals'. A number of deviant behaviors, such as workplace bullying, theft, sabotage, and organizational injustice, are stronger when the perception of organizational politics is high (Khattak et al., 2021).

An understanding of POPs, given their far-reaching effects on key organizational variables such as organizational performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational justice (Bedi and Schat, 2013; Nyathi, 2022), is a reality that management practitioners ought to understand and appreciate. Therefore, this study focuses on POPs, a phenomenon that is viewed as a necessity for organizational growth (Maslyn et al., 2017; Mazzola et al., 2019).

It is defined as a process by which internal organizational stakeholders give meaning to the workplace after undergoing an organization and interpretation of their sensory process (Landells and Albrecht, 2017). The phenomenon is a "perception of an individual's behavior that is not accepted by formal authority and may or may not affect organizational goals" (Khan et al., 2022). The POP outcomes are manifested in employee attitudes, behavior, and organizational performance (Nyathi, 2022).

The multifaceted construct of POPs has been studied from macro-level, micro-level, and multi-level perspectives. The macro-level perspective examines the structural sources of organizational power and the role of coalitions in promoting collective self-interest agendas (Pfeffer, 1992; Pettigrew and McNulty, 1995). The micro-level approach focuses on individual behavior, relationships, and perceptions (Gandz and Murray, 1980; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Ferris et al., 1996; Perrewé et al., 2000). A multifaceted perspective combines two approaches: the micro-level and macro-level approaches. This approach was adopted for this review.

POPs have been shown to have positive effects on several employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Opoku et al., 2020), organizational loyalty (Spurk et al., 2021), and job performance (Abbas and Raja, 2019), and ultimately value-adding effects on the total organization. Research findings have shown POPs to be organizational stressors through hindrance and challenge stressors. It is the challenge stressors that are of importance to this review. The challenge stressors provide opportunities for feelings of attainment, growth, and enhancement among internal stakeholders (Mazzola et al., 2019). Increased employee performance creates feelings of achievement, thereby buttressing the promotional prospects of employees. However, there is a lack of a theoretical model that explains these positive outcomes.

The two objectives of this review are to provide an understanding of how POPs have evolved to play a constructive role in the workplace. This means identifying antecedents and moderating and/or mediating variables that shape positive POPs among employees. The aim of this study is also to model the relationship between independent, moderating, and dependent variables. Previous reviews have not focused on the processes of positive perception formation in employees. There has been little attempt to identify social influence processes explaining positive perceptions amongst internal stakeholders. The motivation for this study stems from the realization that a substantial number of research findings have established perceived organizational politics as a manipulative and disruptive force within organizations. However, a growing list of research findings has established that POPs also play a constructive role. As such, POPs could be utilized by management to influence employees'

perceptions so that a positive role emerges.

A brief history of the perception of organizational politics

Developed just over 30 years ago by Ferris et al. (1989), POPs (then referred to as organizational politics) have generated much but inconclusive research (Chang et al., 2009; Antic et al., 2010; Ferris et al., 2019; Hochwarter et al., 2020). The dark side of organizational politics (OP) has been widely documented and well-articulated (Hall et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2009; Walter et al., 2012), reflecting employees' beliefs about the prominence of self-serving behaviors in organizations.

Ferris et al. (2000) noted the importance of investigating perceived politics, defining POPs as "an individual's subjective evaluation about the extent to which their work environment is characterized by coworkers and supervisors who demonstrate self-serving behaviors" (Ferris et al., 2000, p. 90). Three decades later, POPs continue to garner much interest from both researchers and practitioners as an independent area of scientific inquiry (Ferris et al., 2017). Much of the research has maintained a negative characterization, whereby POPs are viewed as the source of a variety of harmful work consequences, such as high stress and turnover intentions, lower job satisfaction, productivity, and work commitment (Ullah and Ahmad, 2018).

In the last ten years, some researchers (such as Gotsis and Kortezi, 2011; Ferris and Treadway, 2012; Maslyn et al., 2017) have established that POPs also generate positive and effective results for organizations. They have shown that when POPs are viewed as an opportunity, favorable work outcomes result. These outcomes fail to materialize when the phenomenon is viewed as a hindrance. As such, POPs may have both functional and dysfunctional consequences, depending on the self-serving or benevolent volition of decision-makers (Kapoutsis and Thanos, 2016; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2011; Landells and Albrecht, 2017). The positive side (Eldor, 2017; Landells and Albrecht, 2017; Nyathi, 2022) is gaining traction in challenging the exclusivity of the self-interest assumption.

Historically, several studies have viewed OP as a concrete and threatening construct. Specific behaviors often considered and measured as political, include striving for in-group status, sucking up to others, backstabbing, and pursuing personal goals instead of those that benefit the group or organization (Hochwarter et al., 2020). Early literature on the phenomenon described it as occurring when other employees are manipulated and utilized as resources in the workplace. Early theorists argued that it is not actual politics that matters most to organizations, but rather the subjective OP that results in adverse reactions and behaviors (Gandz and Murray, 1980). This argument is based on the suggestion that people operate based on perceptions of reality and not actual reality per se (Lewin, 1936). Similarly, Gandz and Murray (1980) asserted that the presence of OP is a subjective assessment of the behavior of others rather than an objective reality. This assertion rests on the premise that employees' perceptions of their work environment as political, even when misconstrued, create their reality and drive their cognitive and behavioral responses (Ferris et al., 2002; Ferris et al., 2000). This saw the birth of the perception of organizational politics (POPs).

2. Literature review methodology

2.1. Research process

This study explores the antecedents, mediators, and moderators that influence positive organizational consequences for POPs. An integrative review method was used to identify articles on POPs published in the last 13 years (2010–2022) and discuss the lessons learned from this review. Each article has been deductively coded, although inductive coding has also been allowed to gradually evolve. Subsequently, descriptive themes were generated, and differences (in themes) were reflected. A consensus on the main themes was then reached. This study intends to respond to the following research questions:

RQ1. What antecedents positively influence POPs, such that the phenomenon plays a constructive role in organizations?

RQ2. What variables mediate and/or moderate the effect of POPs on positive organizational outcomes?

2.2. Database search methods

The search on ISI Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Scopus made up the primary database for the purposes of this study. To find relevant articles, the following 8 search terms were considered: perception of organizational politics, perceived organizational politics, political skill, political behaviour in organizations, workplace bullying, outcomes of perception of organizational politics, functional politics, and perception of organizational justice.

This procedure resulted in 7803 articles (3894 hits on Scopus, 1723 hits on Google Scholar, and 2186 hits on Web of Science). A number of duplicates were removed from the list. Only papers with POPs as their main research focus were kept. The articles were then examined for relevance to the literature review. The relevance was determined by the article's ability to address the two research questions. A total of 103 articles were established.

2.3. Exclusion/Inclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria for selecting articles for the study were the following:
1) Only studies from peer-reviewed journals, for the period 2010 to 2022 were considered for the study;
2) The studies should have focused on the private and public sectors, excluding not-for-profit organizations.

This focused search registered a final sample of 66 articles that were relevant to the accomplishment of the set objectives. Of these, 40 were from 2010–2019, and 26 from 2020 to 2022. Of the total articles reviewed, 67% adopted a quantitative methodology, and 33% utilized a qualitative methodology. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the papers examined POPs, thirty percent (30%) political behavior in organizations, and 3% perception of organizational justice.

3. Findings

3.1. Introduction

The aim of this review was to establish the antecedents and moderators that influence POPs to play a positive role in organizational growth. Four antecedents dominated the review: organizational, personality, employee skills, and contextual variables. Passion for work, tenacity, and social capital were the main variables moderating the effect of antecedents on positive outcomes (see **Figure 1**).
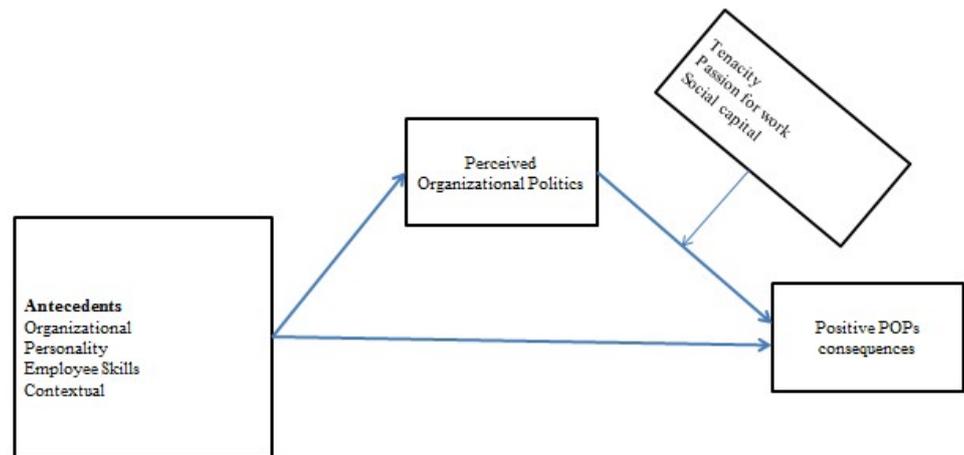

Figure 1. Antecedents and moderators of POPs.

Section I: Perception of Organizational Politics in organizations

The perception of organization politics is essential to the success of organizations in several ways (Bedi and Schat, 2013). The phenomenon influences and impacts several strategic employee outcomes, such as job performance, job satisfaction, job attitudes, organizational trust, commitment, and employee stress. These perceptions are also connected to lower perceptions of organizational trust and support. Negative POPs trigger higher intentions to leave, job stress, burnout, and low organizational citizenship behaviors (Bedi and Schat, 2013). The phenomenon also negatively affects discretionary extra-role employee behaviors that benefit the group and organization, such as volunteering and helping others.

The seminal model of POPs, consisting of antecedents and consequences, anchors most studies in workplace politics (Ferris et al., 2002). The antecedents are factors contributing to POPs. Antecedents are the independent variables explaining the positive POP outcomes, which are dependent variables. The model categorizes antecedents into three groupings: organizational, job, and personal influences. This categorization permeates several studies prior to the period under study. Organizational influences consist of structural dimensions that make up the personality of organizations, e.g., level of formalization and centralization (Hochwarter, 2012). POPs are positively related to the centralization of decision-making and procedural justice in organizations. When power is decentralized and organizational procedures are consistent, transparent, and fair, employees experience lower POPs (Atinc et al., 2010). Formalization of rules, standards, and communication flows thereof also lowers POPs (Atinc et al., 2010). In this study, three additional

organizational influences are organizational democracy, the use of information technology, and the leadership style adopted by top managers (Hochwarter et al., 2020).

Job influences consist of factors inherent in the job/work environment (Atinc et al., 2010). Employees' POPs are likely to be lower if their job expectations are met. Their POPs are also likely to be lower if there are opportunities for development and advancement. This results in improved relationships with their leaders, and a trusting relationship with coworkers. Jobs involving higher autonomy and feedback also have lower POPs (Atinc et al., 2010). The availability of employee coping strategies is an additional job influence emerging post-2010. Personal influences consist of skills that organizational members possess (Elbanna et al., 2017). Employees who are pessimistic and hold an untrustworthy view of human nature are likely to experience higher POP, as are people who are prone to negative moods and emotions (Atinc et al., 2010). Conversely, people who believe they are in control of their environment and people who are prone to positive moods and emotions are likely to experience lower POP (Atinc et al., 2010). In this review, emotional intelligence is an additional influence on POPs.

The fourth influence of POPs consists of employees' political skills. This influence relates to employees' ability to maintain good leader-employee relationships. Employees with high political skills have the capacity to adopt positive behavior that benefits the whole organization as well as helping colleagues solve problems. This leads to lower POPs.

Earlier conceptualizations of POP consequences were described as negative and backward-looking. The consequences of negative POPs were listed as low employee morale, divisions amongst internal stakeholders, and ultimately high levels of conflict, stress, lower employee productivity, loss of focus on corporate goals, uncertainty about the future, and resistance to strategic change. These outcomes are all undesirable and dysfunctional. Such conceptualization emanates from using a reactive and reluctant lens. The reactive view sees POPs as destructive and manipulative. The reluctant lens sees POPs as a necessary evil that should be avoided. Management, however, reluctantly uses POPs as they get tasks done through the phenomenon. These perspectives therefore emphasize the negative aspects of POPs.

There has, however, been a slow but steady shift from this negative conceptualization to a positive one wherein the phenomenon is seen as playing a strategic role in aiding functions within organizations (Liu et al., 2010). POPs are also seen through integrated lenses as helping organizations function well in addition to facilitating better decision-making (Landells and Albrecht, 2017). These perspectives give rise to positive POP consequences such as the promotion of ideas, recognition for good performance, improvement of organizational goals, better decision-making, improved communication, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Ferris et al., 2019).

Several moderators have received attention in recent studies. The notable ones are tenacity, organizational commitment, social capital, goal congruence, and POPs. As with antecedents, there is a lack of consensus on the most effective moderators in the antecedent-POPs-work outcome relationship (Hochwartger et al., 2020). There is unanimity, though, when it comes to mediating variables, with all studies using POPs.

Recent research has focused on a balanced treatment of POPs that includes both positive and negative political perceptions (Ferris et al., 2002; Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011; Kapoutsis and Thanos, 2016; etc.). This approach is motivated by a desire to understand how employees actually perceive politics at play in their organizations (Ferris et al., 2017; Landells and Albrecht, 2017). They believe it is one's perception of an otherwise neutral construct that gets it labeled negative or positive.

Section II: Latest antecedents and moderators shaping positive POPs

POPs may be viewed as a manifestation of social influence processes that are essentially neutral. It is the purpose of the respective behavior that renders it positive or negative (Pfeffer, 1992), and hence the nature of outcomes. Several factors seem to shape employees' perceptions of organizational politics. These factors, with a high frequency of citation, share a lot in common with the classification provided by Ferris et al. (2002).

3.2. Organizational factors

3.2.1. Organizational democracy

When employees enjoy transparent and accountable management within a system of organizational democracy, negative political behavior declines (Turabik and Baskan, 2019). Political behaviors exhibited for the purpose of obtaining resources will decrease in the presence of fair resource sharing through participatory decision-making. Since employees are more likely to adopt rules that are shaped by their own decisions, conflicts and, consequently, political behaviors should decrease in a democratic workplace (Turabik and Baskan, 2019). There is a negative relationship between organizational democracy, on the one hand, and the frequency of encountering political behaviors. Organizational democracy predicts the frequency of encountering political behaviors (Turabik and Baskan, 2019). It is associated with increased job satisfaction, innovation, stakeholder attachment, and organizational performance through positive POPs (Harrison and Freeman, 2004; Kesen, 2015).

3.2.2. Leader-member exchange

Leader-member exchange has been investigated in several studies as a predictor of POPs (Miller and Nicols, 2008; Rosen et al., 2011). The leader-member exchange theory underpinning this relationship emphasizes the dyadic nature of the relationship between the leader and the subordinates (Humphrey, 2014). Leaders are assumed to adopt different leadership styles for different subordinates. The styles range from being friendly and close on one hand to being formal and impersonal on the other (Humphrey, 2014). Accordingly, some of the employees are designated as the 'in-group members' while others represent the 'out-group members' (Miller and Nicols, 2008). The leader supervises 'in-group members' in a personal manner, while the relationship with 'out-group members' is impersonal (Humphrey, 2014).

Several research findings have established a link between leader-member exchange and POPs (e.g., Rosen et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2016; Al Jisr et al., 2020). The construct has been found to be negatively related to POPs where relationships are poor (Miller and Nicols, 2008; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Kacmar et al., 1999). When employees have better relationships with their leader, they are less likely to consider the workplace as political. In good exchanges between subordinates and their

supervisor, information access and trust are increased, therefore leading to reduced political activity (Atinc et al., 2010). In low-quality exchanges, subordinates distrust their supervisor because the latter does not give them the support and rewards they need (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001).

3.2.3. Information technology

The introduction of information technology (IT) in organizations affects POPs in a number of ways. First, IT use redistributes power among organizational members: conferring more power on some and reducing the power of others. The beneficiaries of this power redistribution are likely to reward an organization by engaging in positive organizational citizenship behaviors, such as improved individual performance, job satisfaction, and lower labor turnover (Opoku et al., 2020). Second, IT use distributes non-randomly, the information required for coping with uncertainty, role ambiguity, and role conflict (Opoku et al., 2020). By distributing such information, the use of IT, therefore, allows organizational members to cope with the uncertainty brought about by the work environment.

Third, the use of IT enhances feedback pertaining to organizational policies and practices (Maslyn et al., 2017). When employees are afforded a chance to scrutinize organizational policies and practices, a perception of fairness and justice develops. POPs develop with the concomitant benefits of work attitudes and behaviors. Fourth, IT promotes centralized structures, leading to clarity of organizational rules (Maslyn et al., 2017). This again reduces role ambiguity and lowers the negative perception of organizational politics. Collectively, IT use results in a reduction of negative perceptions of organizational politics in the workplace (and an increase in positive political labeling).

3.3. Contextual factors

3.3.1. Co-worker cooperation

Co-worker cooperation is defined as "the quality of the relationship between an employee and his or her co-workers" (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001, p. 353). It is a form of social support and teamwork among members working in the same organization (Harris et al., 2005). According to Poon (2006), helping co-workers is a voluntary behavior that is costly and time-consuming for those employees who engage in it. Nevertheless, cooperative behavior is important for the organization to adapt to environmental changes. In reality, support and cooperation between co-workers alleviate the negative effects of the work environment by lowering competition over scarce resources and reducing self-serving behavior (Atinc et al., 2010). Cooperation also builds understanding among co-workers and enables them to cope with the adversities of the work environment (Valle et al., 2003).

The POPs literature that has explored the relationship between politics and coworker cooperation, notes the existence of an inverse relationship (e.g., Andrews and Kacmar, 2001; Harris et al., 2005; Poon, 2006). The cooperation among co-workers decreases POPs (Harris et al., 2005; Andrews and Kacmar, 2001; Parker et al., 1995; etc.). When intergroup cooperation exists, organizational members are less likely to compete over resources (Parker et al., 1995). The higher the cooperation among co-workers, the lower their perceptions of politics in the workplace.

3.3.2. Coping strategies

Cavanaugh et al. (2000) argued that workers appraise workplace stressors as either challenges or hindrances. Challenge stressors represent motivating obstacles (LePine et al., 2005), problems to overcome, and ones considered solvable. Though stressful, challenge stressors produce eustress, a positive feeling of achievement. Hindrance stressors, in contrast, are characterized as impasses, strain increasing, and demotivating (LePine et al., 2005), which result in distress, and a feeling of depletion. In response to these stressors, employees may activate one of two different coping strategies: (i) problem-focused coping, which involves employees industriously seeking ways to solve and overcome the threat, and (ii) emotion-focused coping (Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010; Nes and Segerstrom, 2006), in which employees attempt to alleviate negative stress effects through unresponsive actions, such as withdrawal or denial. Research supports the assumption that problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping both reduce stress and increase well-being. Research has also shown that problem-focused coping strategies are useful for controllable stressors but are potentially damaging responses to uncontrollable stressors (Aldridge and Roesch, 2007). Similarly, emotion-focused coping is most beneficial for uncontrollable stressors (Austenfeld and Stanton, 2004). Ultimately, employees who utilize emotion-coping strategies evaluate POPs as high due to their lack of resources to play the 'political game'. Conversely, employees who utilize problem-focused strategies evaluate workplaces as having low POPs due to their 'ability' to manage the stressors.

3.3.3. Leadership style

Several studies have shown that organizational politics is strongly related to fairness and justice in the workplace (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Butcher and Clarke, 2002; etc.). The managerial strategy underlying the transformational leadership style reinforces moral values, thereby contributing positively to feelings of fairness and justice (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991). This style of leadership may therefore create a positive organizational climate that supports professionalism and excellence, resulting in reduced POPs. In addition, the transparency in decision-making processes that characterizes the transformational leader may also contribute to reducing the POPs by strengthening the belief that both the leader and the organization are fair and just (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996).

The transformational leadership style reduces the POPs in organizations because it offers a vision, a mission, and an operative plan for goal achievement (Humphrey, 2014). Reduced ambiguity and uncertainty validate the feeling that it is possible to deal with organizational challenges in a way based on justice and fairness. Transformational leadership thus creates a positive organizational climate that supports professionalism and excellence resulting in reduced POPs. In sum, transformational leadership has characteristics that could reduce POPs among employees.

3.4. Employee skills

Political skill

Political skill is the ability to understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives. Politically skilled employees are socially astute, can effectively read others, and have the ability to self-regulate and adapt to different situations (Andrews and Kacmar, 2009). With high political skills, employees who have outstanding capacities in networking can usually acquire more opportunities to meet, communicate, and cooperate with leaders than other employees, which can help to deepen mutual understanding and establish good personal relationships. Further, it is argued that to attain success, politically skilled individuals are more likely to perform organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) as a way to distinguish themselves from others (Jawahar et al., 2008). Besides, the sincerity of employees with high political skills is likely to attract their leaders' trust and faith. This is also very important for building and maintaining leader-member relationships. Employees with high political skills therefore have a capacity to adopt positive behavior that improves the whole organization as well as helps colleagues solve problems. This helps employees label the politics positively.

3.5. Personality factors

The personality of an employee plays a vital role in the way an individual perceives organizational politics and justice in the workplace.

3.5.1. Locus of control

A locus of control orientation is "a belief about whether the outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal control orientation) or on events outside our personal control (external control orientation)." (Zimbardo, 1985, p. 275). Employees with external locus of control perceive the workplace as more political because they attribute anything that happens to them to external factors. The opposite is true for employees with an internal locus of control. This relationship was substantiated in a number of research findings (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001; Miller and Nicols, 2008; Agarwal, 2016; etc.). POPs mediate the relationship between locus of control and POPs consequences. Internals therefore believe that the outcomes earned are based on the energy and effort that employees expend (Galvin et al., 2018). Internals are less likely to perceive higher workplace politics.

3.5.2. Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to an aptitude to manage oneself as well as other stakeholders (Louw and Venter, 2019). There are two sets of competencies: those for managing oneself, and those for managing one's relationships. The competencies for managing oneself are self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation. Self-awareness relates to understanding one's "emotions, values and goals" and how these affect others (Louw and Venter, 2019, p. 425). Introspection involves identifying one's strengths and weaknesses, capabilities, and strategic direction (Gorgens-Ekermans and Roux, 2021). Research has shown that emotional intelligence improves work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, job performance, and conflict resolution (Mayer et

al., 2008; Meisler, 2013). Emotional intelligence affects how organizational politics is perceived (Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017) through a number of mechanisms. First, emotional intelligence increases the quality of interactions with others, which in turn leads to lower perceptions of organizational politics. POPs mediate the effect of emotional intelligence on work outcomes. Second, emotional intelligence improves leader-member exchange, resulting in a lower perception of organizational politics. It is therefore negatively related to POPs.

3.6. Moderator variables

Three factors (tenacity, passion for work, and social capital) affect the direction and/or strength of the relationship between antecedents and positive POP consequences (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

3.6.1. Tenacity

Tenacity refers to employees' perseverance or persistence in their efforts to achieve work-related goals, which is useful in adverse work situations (Baum and Locke, 2004; De Clercq and Belauuigoitia, 2017). Tenacious employees have the stamina and focus, to deal with the challenges that arise in strongly politicized organizational climates. They also overcome the resistance they encounter in their efforts to address unfavorable organizational conditions (De Clercq and Belausteguigoita, 2017). Ultimately, employees with strong tenacity can protect themselves from the threats of negative POPs and thus remain emotionally attached to their employers, with positive consequences for the organizations. Tenacity therefore moderates the antecedent and positive POP consequences relationship.

3.6.2. Passionate about work

Employees, who are passionate about their work, experience a positive sense of accomplishment when they are able to overcome work-related challenges (Vallerand et al., 2003). Similarly, employees who are passionate about their work can draw from significant positive energy that enables them to cope with self-serving organizational climates. They may derive a sense of personal accomplishment when they can address the associated challenges (Vallerand et al., 2003). Ultimately, these employees could protect themselves from the threats of POPs and thus remain emotionally attached to their employer.

Tenacity and passion for work function as buffers, such that the escalation of perceived organizational politics into diminished helping behavior is less likely. These buffers allow employees the discretionary energy to counter negative POPs. The negative relationship between perceived organizational politics and affective commitment is weaker among employees equipped with higher levels of tenacity and/ or passion for work. These two variables, moderate the relationship between POPs and desired organizational outcomes.

3.6.3. Social capital

The construct represents an investment in social relations for mutual benefits (Klein, 2013). Sherif et al. (2006) associated social capital with the exchange of knowledge among employees. It is a network of mutual trust among employees, which helps in increasing creativity and efficiency (Sozbilir, 2018). It leads to powerful

societal outcomes (Lange, 2015) and helps individuals and organizations to solve conflicts, excel in learning, and increase performance. Jay and Andersen (2018) examined the relationship between social capital and workplace stress among 500 laboratory technicians. In this cross-sectional study, social capital helped employees against perceived stress. Boyas et al. (2012) examined the relationship between social capital, job stress, and turnover intentions among child protection workers in the USA. The results suggest that social capital is helpful in reducing stress, burnout, and turnover intentions among old workers as compared to young workers. This shows that age also matters in this regard. Social capital moderates the relationship between POPs and employee outcomes in terms of job stress, job satisfaction, and turnover intention (Lange, 2015).

Section III: Theoretical perspectives

Notwithstanding the lack of a POPs unifying theory, a number of theories and models have been adopted to explain the effect of antecedents, mediators, and moderators on work outcomes. Theories have been used to explain the relationship between antecedents and POPs and between POPs and work outcomes. The POPs are considered negative or positive out of the "idiosyncratic uniqueness of the perceiver" (Byrne et al., 2017, p. 6). The labeling of a work situation by employees is therefore dependent on the individual. The same theories that were used to label perceived politics as a negative phenomenon have been adopted to label the construct positive.

The conservation of resources (COR) theory (Sun and Chen, 2017) is the most commonly used theory to explain an individual employee's perception of politics. The basic tenet of COR theory is that to maximize hedonic pleasure and future successes, individuals seek to maintain 'resources,' the absence of which produces an aversive, stressful state (i.e., strain). For example, one class of resources that the COR theory outlines is personal characteristics, such as political skill (Seitz and Misra, 2020), social capital (Jay and Andersen, 2018), emotional intelligence (Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017), tenacity, and passion for work (de Clercq et al., 2021). It has been argued that POPs threaten and diminish such resources (Halbesleben and Wheeler 2006; Harris et al. 2009), leaving individuals strained and unable to steel themselves against stressors (Hochwarter et al. 2020). The availability of these resources has a positive effect on POPs.

According to the attribution theory (Kacmar et al., 2013), employees who are capable of finding solutions to difficult "work situations tend to feel less overpowered by job situations and thus have a lower need to find scapegoats for the experienced hardships" (Clercq et al., 2021, p. 2244). Their ability to address such challenges reduces their tendency to blame an organization for its failures. Consequently, organizational members are demotivated to label these work situations as negative. Employees in possession of these solutions are likely to label perceived politics as positive because they can protect themselves from the threats of POPs. They remain emotionally attached to their employer, with positive consequences for their propensity to extend voluntary help to organizational colleagues.

The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Williams et al., 2016) is also a predictor of POPs. It is a relationship-based, dyadic theory of leadership. According to this theory, leadership resides in the quality of the exchange relationship developed between leaders and their followers. High-quality exchanges are characterized by trust,

liking, and mutual respect. The quality of this relationship has implications for job-related well-being and the effectiveness of employees. Improved trust and mutual respect in the exchange process reduce negativity associated with the work environment, leading to positive perceptions of politics.

Researchers have also used the social exchange theory (Crawford et al., 2019) to explain employees' reactions to POPs (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Rosen et al., 2014). Organizations exist in social marketplaces wherein employees and employers exchange resources, such that employers offer both concrete (e.g., pay) and symbolic resources (e.g., socio-emotional resources that indicate an individual is competent, supported, and considered a person of worth) in exchange for employee productivity. Employees seek balance in their exchange relationships. As such, employees are more likely to develop negative attitudes toward the organization and be less likely to maintain performance levels when they perceive their exchange partner is not providing expected resources. If the exchange is perceived as fair, POPs are labeled positive (Rosen et al., 2009).

The challenge-hindrance model is also associated with labeling POPs. The model identifies workplace stressors as falling into two categories: hindrance and challenge stressors. Hindrances and stressors interfere with performance goals. They do not provide opportunities for growth and development, e.g., poor equipment, ambiguity, and interruptions that prevent employees from performing their jobs well (Opoku et al., 2020). Challenge stressors, on the other hand, contribute to performance opportunities. They provide opportunities for feelings of accomplishment, growth, and development, e.g., workloads and deadlines (Mazzola and Disselhorst, 2019). Successful management of high workloads and scheduled deadlines by employees creates a sense of achievement resulting from high performance. Contrary to numerous conclusions on the negative effect of stressors, positive outcomes have been recorded, such as job satisfaction (Opoku et al., 2020), organizational loyalty (Spurk et al., 2021), and job performance (Abbas and Raja, 2019). The labeling of POPs under these circumstances is positive.

Each of these theories helps shed light on how perceptions, herein regarded as a neutral variable, are shaped either positively or negatively. When perceptions are positive, they become a catalyst for organizational growth. A combination of these theories could therefore help management influence employees' perceptions of organizational politics.

4. Discussion and conclusions

POPs, like several independent variables in organizational settings, make use of employee outcomes as their transmission mechanism to realize desired organizational consequences. The reactive and reluctant perspectives have rendered the phenomenon ineffective in engineering the desired organizational consequences. The strategic and integrated perspectives see POPs as playing a positive and value-adding role in achieving organizational outcomes.

This review sought to achieve two objectives. The first objective sought to establish the antecedents that influence POPs positively, such that the phenomenon plays a constructive role in organizations. There are four essential antecedents of

positive POPs: organizational, personality, employee, and contextual influences. These influences weigh in to influence how employees and managers perceive organizational politics. Organizational influences establish an organization-wide conducive environment for healthy manager-employee engagements. Accountable management (Turabik and Baskan, 2019), cordial relationships between management and subordinates (Al Jisr et al., 2020), and investment in information technology (Opoku et al., 2020), influence internal stakeholders' POPs. They influence managers and employees to adopt strategic and/or integrative perspectives when viewing POPs.

The enabling macro-environment alone is, however, inadequate to buttress a positive perception. The contextual (work environment) factors reinforce these perceptions by alleviating the negative effects arising from the organizational environment. Improved co-worker cooperation (Atinc et al., 2010), use of product-focused coping strategies (Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010), and transformational leadership style (Humphrey, 2014) help further the organizational micro-environment.

The personality and skills of employees also influence how employees and managers perceive organizational politics. The ability to enhance leader-subordinate relationships results in increased trust and mutual understanding. This augments the leader-member relationship through organizational influences. Employees' emotional intelligence and locus of control bring personal characteristics into play to influence one's view of the construct. Overall, there is a lack of consensus on the significant antecedents that influence POPs. Many studies are restricted to 'picking a few variables' from an inventory list (Atnic et al., 2010). Atinc et al. (2010) examined twenty-six primary antecedents, finding significant associations for just thirteen. There has also been no consensus on the role of antecedents in the model. The majority of studies show the antecedents as having an indirect effect on work outcomes, with POPs having an intervening role. Other studies have antecedents having a direct effect on work outcomes, with POPs playing a moderating role in the antecedent-work-outcomes relationship. Research on the antecedents of POPs has grown wider in recent years as researchers'seek to add' those that have a positive influence too. This growth was anticipated, given the subjective nature of the phenomenon (Hochwarter et al., 2020). It seems unlikely that the discipline will mature based on the significant antecedents that influence POPs positively, with the list continuing to expand.

The second objective sought to establish variables that moderate the effect of POPs on positive organizational outcomes. Alongside many antecedents, there has been a proliferation of moderators purported to explain relationships between POPs and work outcomes. The most identified moderators are tenacity, social capital, and passion for work. The list continues to grow with each new research project. There is, however, an absence of moderating variables to explain relationships between antecedents and POP variables. This gap is recommended for future research. Ferris et al. (1989, 2002) model limited moderating effects on personal characteristics (Yang, 2017; Rosen et al., 2011). The mediating role of POPs between antecedents and outcomes is well documented (Vigoda, 2000; Ferris et al., 2002; Atinc et al., 2010; etc.).

There has, however, been no growth in terms of forward progression or depth. This is in part due to the limitations imposed by the foundational models (Ferris et al., 1989; 2002) in the categorization of antecedents. There has been consensus, though,

on work outcomes in POPs research. POPs impact job involvement, job satisfaction, anxiety, withdrawal, commitment, justice, trust, cynicism, and performance (Ferris et al., 2002; Atinc et al., 2010; Hochwarter et al., 2020), in-role performance (Vigoda, 2000), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and perceived innovation (Parker et al., 1995; Atinc et al., 2010; Hochwarter et al., 2020). The most researched outcomes are job stress/anxiety, individual performance, job satisfaction, commitment, trust, justice, and organizational citizenship behavior.

POPs are essentially neutral. It is employees who render it positive or negative. Organizational politics is not a concrete and objective construct. As such, employee behaviors are a response to POPs (Gandz and Murray, 1980), which is what they think organizational politics was like at the time.

5. Limitations

This research makes use of 66 peer-reviewed articles to evaluate the positive POPS. More articles were ideal for the 13-year period under review. This would have led to a better understanding of previously under-researched conceptualized POP relationships. The exclusion of non-profit organizations in this study makes it low on population validity. Results from this sub-sector would have been helpful in a sectoral comparison of attitudes amongst organizational members towards POPs. All studies carried out were cross-sectional in nature. They relied primarily on single-source survey approaches, often collected at one point in time. Although there are times when this approach is warranted, a mix of longitudinal designs is ideal in order to capture discrete political events that take time to evolve. POPs are a dynamic construct, and as such, they need to be studied over a period of time.

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