Full Length Research Paper

Combined effects of perception of politics and political skill on employee job outcomes

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This cross sectional field survey was aimed at exploring the direct and combined effects of political skill and politics perception on employee job outcomes such as job stress, affective commitment, intention to quit and contextual performance. Using a sample of 300 managerial employees from public and private sector organizations of Pakistan, results revealed significant differences in intention to quit and contextual performance for combined effects of political skill and perception of organizational politics. Managerial implications and future research directions are given at the end.

Key words: Perception of organizational politics, job stress, affective commitment, intention to quit, contextual performance, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

According to Pfeffer (1992), political skill is very critical to obtain benefits for oneself. As being sensitive, the ability to identify with others are the major facets of political skill. Socially, individual attitude was often seen as ingenious, even clever, in dealing with others. Individuals with political skill had an unassuming and convenience personal style that asserted a powerful influence on others around them. Interpersonal influences allowed people to adopt and calibrate their behavior to different situations to elicit the desired responses from others. Pfeffer (1992) referred interpersonal influence as flexibility, which involved adopting ones behavior to different targets of influence in different contextual settings to achieve ones goals.

Individuals with political skills identified and developed diverse contacts and networks with people. People in these networks tend to hold assets seen as valuable for successful personal and organizational gains. Because of their typical subtle style, individual's political skill easily developed friendships, beneficial alliances and collisions Furthermore, individuals high in networking ability were creating and taking advantage of opportunities. Politically,

skilled individuals appeared to have high level of integrity and were seen as authentic, sincere and genuine. Perceived intentions or motives were important and have been argued to modify the interpretation and labeling of behavior. As noted by Jones (1990), influence attempts will be successful when actors are perceived to posses no hidden motives. Individuals high in patent sincerity inspired trust and confidence in and from those around them, because their actions were not interpretive or coercive. On the other hand, perception of organizational politics is the phenomenon which has negative consequences for individual employees working in the organization.

The research on this construct has revealed negative relationship with job performance (Ferris et al., 1996), affective commitment (Chang et al., 2009), organizational justice (Bozeman et al., 1996), job satisfaction (Vigoda, 2000) and positive relationship with outcomes such as job stress (Bozeman et al., 1996) and intention to quit (Dunham, 1977). In this study, we are going to pitch political skill as buffering element which helps individuals to cope up with the negative effects of politics perceptions on job outcomes. Based on conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 2002), political skill is the mechanism which helps coping stressors and performance better on the job. Individuals with high political skill will least likely be affected by politics and their job

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stress and their intention to quit will be low. A study suggested that political skill can be the coping mechanism to reduce the effects of job stressors (Harvey et al., 2007). Due to high political skill, these employees' contextual performance will not be affected by politics perception. This study will help explore the combined effects of political skill and perception of politics on job stress, intention to quit and contextual performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception of organizational politics and job outcomes

When individuals cognitively plan to leave the organization, their minds and energies turn to other available job options. They are also exposed to more job and occupational stressors and therefore tend to be less focused on their job duties; all these factors may cause a decline in job performance (Bozeamn et al., 1996; Ferris et al., 1996).

Better fitted employees may have more positive attitude to their jobs and to the workplace. Such employees do not develop feelings of alienation, disappointment, mistrust or other negative job attitudes, while other employees perhaps do. As a result, they are expected to show improved work outcomes (Vigoda, 2000). Chang et al. (2009) conducted meta-analysis and result indicated that perception of politics had strong and positive effect on employee job stress. On the basis of these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1: Perception of politics is positively related to job stress.

Meta-analytical findings suggested that organizational politics was negatively related to affective commitment (Chang et al., 2009). Organizational politics and job attitude will both be useful in explaining other work outcomes such as employees' intention to leave (exit) and tendencies to neglect job duties. The higher the perception of politics in organizational members, the lower was the level of justice, equity and fairness (Bozeman et al., 1996; Cropanzano et al., 1997). Cropanzano et al. (1997) found that employees view the organization as political in nature, unequal or promoting only the aspiration of the powerful members. So, they may be encouraged to leave it physically and also psychologically. Organizational politics can cause disengagement or psychological withdrawal of individuals. Based on these research argument and findings, the following hypothesis is proposed for the current study:

H_2: Perception of politics is negatively related to affective commitment.

Based on Hirschman (1970) theory of reaction to organizational politics, it was found that organizational politics resulted in negative repercussions, such as job dissatisfaction, high levels of neglect, or intention to leave. That was, when some organizational members misused politics, effect on co-workers was inevitable (Ferris et al., 1998).

According to Chang et al. (2009), perception of organizational politics was positively related with intention to quit. According to Dunham (1977), organizational politics have indirect effects on intention to quit and showed through more direct outcomes (for example, strain and moral). Internal politics in the organization was related to job attitude and resulted the individuals intention to exit or neglect and effected the individuals overall performance (Hochwarter et al., 1997). Previous studies have found a positive relationship between perception of organizational politics and intention to quit:

H_3: Perception of politics is positively related to intention to quit.

Contextual performance is defined as, when employees were involved in helping co-workers, putting their extra efforts and extra hours to complete a task on time and so forth, the employees were said to be involved in contextual performance (Van Scotter, 2000). According to Kiker and Motowidlo (1999), contextual performance was "behaviors supporting organizations social and psychological environment in which the technical core must function".

According to a study by Witt et al. (2002), the presence of organizational politics was a situational indicator based on individual interpretations of the organizational climate that was expected to influence employee's behavior and supervisor's interpretation of that behavior. The perception of politically charged atmosphere reflected action taken by the individuals that were beyond the parameters of accepted organizational behavior:

H_4: Perception of politics is negatively related to contextual performance.

Political skill and job outcomes

According to Perrewe et al. (2000), a political skill is an antidote for workplace stressors; the effective use of political skills can reduce job stress. The political skills were conceptualized as directly reducing executive's perceptions of organizational and extra organizational stressors (Perrewe et al., 2000). If there were more political skills, then people were more confident about their ability to control images, impressions and interactions at work, which in turn, help them cope up and reduce stress:

H_5: Political skill is negatively related to job stress.

Politics defined many dimensions of behaviors including values and political activity, ethical issues, working with the senior administrators and president, role of the middle managers and challenges for women (Moore, 1991).

Based on the previous research, it was recommended that power was an important tool of decision-making and should be used through effective leaders. According to Rowley et al. (1997), political pressures may go ahead to conflict when outlook of professional roles do not intersect with those of the general administration and negative politics could generate disquiet within a department. According to Boehman (2007), political activity reduced affective commitment to the organization:

H_6: Political skill is negatively related to affective commitment.

Political skill is the ability "to exercise formal power with sensitivity to the feelings of others, to know where to concentrate one's energies, to sense what is possible, to organize the necessary alliances" (Mintzberg, 1983). Research showed that workplace was strongly linked with undesirable outcomes such as turnover intention (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999). In general, organizational research has revealed that workplace isolation is related to higher levels of turnover intentions, as well as lower levels of satisfaction (Hitlan et al., 2006). Harvey et al. (2007) investigated whether individuals' political skill could satisfy the negative effects of social stressors on outcome.

The results supported the hypothesized negative influence of social stressors on outcomes. On the basis of this literature support, we argue that political skill decreases the level of turnover intention.

H_7: Political skill is negatively related to intention to quit.

Political skill is mostly related to how individuals perceive stressors and manage stress (Brotheridge, 2001). Individuals viewed political skill as an opportunity rather than as threat, it makes easy the institution of alliances, friendships and connections, which in turn leads to a positive uniqueness in their network (Perrewe et al., 2000).

According to Ferris et al. (2005), political skill was linked with higher job performance. Jawhar et al. (2000) verified that political skill was a stronger predictor of contextual than task performance and that it was a stronger predictor of contextual performance than self-efficacy. On the basis of these, the following hypothesis is predicted:

H_8: Political skill is positively related to contextual performance.

Political skills moderate the relationship between perception of organizational politics and job outcomes

Keeping in view the meta-analytical findings, perception of organizational politics is positively associated with employee job stress (Chang et al., 2009). Political skill is suggested to be the coping mechanism which helps

individual cope up negative effects of stressors on job outcomes (Harvey et al., 2007). A study by Perrewe et al. (2004) investigated moderation of political skill to reduce negative effect of job stress. So the people having high level of political skill will easily adjust to and cope with negative effects of perception of politics and consequently their job stress will be lowered down due to buffering effects of political skill. On the basis of this argument and literature support, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H_9: Political skill moderates the relationship between perception of organizational politics and job stress, such that the relationship will be weaker when political skill is high.

Hochwarter (2003) conducted a study to examine the impact of political behavior and perceptions of politics, job satisfaction and affective commitment. The study hypothesized that perceived politics and political behavior would interact to predict affective commitment and job satisfaction. Using data of 131 police officers the results revealed incremental variance due to interaction of political behavior and perception of organizational politics. These results supported that in an environment perceived to be highly political, some individuals may experience positive consequences. The negative relationship between perception of politics and affective commitment will be stronger, when political skill of an individual is high. On the basis of this literature and argument, the following hypothesis is being proposed:

H_{10}: Political skill moderates the relationship between perception of politics and affective commitment, such that the relationship will be stronger when political skill is high.

According to Sowmya and Panchanatham (2011), turnover intention is an outcome of organizational politics. Keeping in view the meta-analytical findings perception of organizational politics was positively associated with intention to quit (Chang et al., 2009). Perception of politics is one of the stressors and it is major predictor of intention to quit. On the other hand, political skill is suggested to be a coping element which helps individuals reduce negative consequences of stressors (Harvey et al., 2007). So people with higher level of politics perception are more likely to have higher level of intention to quit. High political skill will help individuals reduce negative effects of political environment and in turn, will lower down the intention to quit. On the basis of this literature support and argument, we proposed following hypothesis:

H_{11}: Political skill moderates the relationship between perception of politics and intention to quit, such that the relationship will be weaker when political skill is high.

As a stressor, perception of organizational politics has a negative influence on contextual performance (Witt et al.,
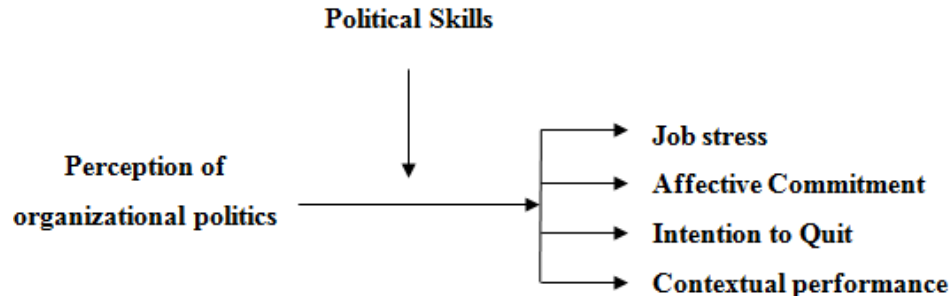
Figure 1. Model.

2002). Political skill will help individuals cope up with these negative effects on contextual performance. So the negative relation between perception of politics and contextual performance will be weaker when political skill of an individual is high. In case of low political skill this negative relationship will be stronger. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model. On the basis of this argument, we proposed following hypothesis:

H_{12}: Political skill moderates the relationship between perception of politics and contextual performance, such that the relationship will be weaker when political skill is high.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and data collection

The study used a sample of 300 employees from different public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. The data was collected through self administered questionnaires from managerial level employees of the organizations. These include a multinational bank, telecommunication and IT organizations, a local manufacturing organization and a service sector organization. A cover letter was also attached with the questionnaire which explained the purpose of research and scope of the study along with the assurance of confidentiality. Participation in this study was voluntary in nature based on personal references of study authors in different organizations. The language of the questionnaire was English because all managerial level employees were well educated and official language in organizations of Pakistan is English. So, there was no need to translate questionnaires into local language.

Measures

Perception of organizational politics

Perception of politics was measured with 15-item scale developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). Sample questions included "There has always been an influential group in this department that no one ever crosses", "It is best not to rock the boat in this organization", "Telling others what they want to hear is sometimes better than telling the truth". A 5-point scale "1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree" was used and the alpha reliability was (α = 0.71).

Political skill

Political skill was measured with 40-item scale developed by Ferris

et al. (2005). The questions included "I size up situations before deciding how to present an idea to others", "I am good at reading social situations and determining the most appropriate behavior to demonstrate the proper impression", "I understand people very well". A 7-point scale "1= strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree" was used and the alpha reliability was (α = 0.89).

Job stress

Job stress was measured with 13-item scale developed by Kacmar et al. (1983). Sample items included "I have too much work and too little time to do it", "Too many people at my level in the organization get burned out by job demands". A 5-point scale "1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used and the alpha reliability was (α = 0.7).

Affective commitment

Affective commitment was measured with 8-item scale developed by Allen and Mayer (1990). Sample questions included "I don't think I could become as attached to another organization as I am to this organization", "I feel like a part of the family at my organization". A 5-point scale "1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree" was used and the alpha reliability was (α = 0.7).

Intention to quit

Intention to quit was measured with 3-item scale developed by Cammann et al. (1979). The sample item included "I often think about quitting". A 5-point scale "1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree" was used and the alpha reliability was (α = 0.71).

Contextual performance

Contextual performance was measured with 15-item scale developed by Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994). Sample items included "I praise my colleagues when they are successful", "I put in extra hours to get work done on time." A 7-point scale "1= strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree" was used and the alpha reliability was (α = 0.91).

Control variable

To check the influence of demographic variables, one-way ANOVA was run and results revealed significant difference in outcomes for qualification, position in organization, current employment and working experience. So these were controlled for further analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Gender	1.30	0.46
Age	1.34	0.59
Qualification	3.63	0.57
Organization	1.19	0.39
Position	1.92	0.67
C_Employment	2.87	0.89
W_Experiance	1.35	0.77
POP	3.17	0.49
PS	4.03	0.63
JS	3.18	0.52
AC	2.99	0.59
ITQ	2.79	0.89
CP	3.24	0.51

POP = Perception of organizational politics, PS = Political skill, JS = Job stress, AC = Affective commitment, ITQ = Intention to quit, CP = Contextual performance.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. The mean of gender was ($M = 1.30$) with ($S.D = 0.46$), 70% of the respondents were male. The mean age was ($M = 1.34$) with ($S.D = .59$). The mean of qualification was ($M = 3.63$) with ($S.D = 0.57$), which showed that 58.3% respondents had masters degree. The mean of type of organization was ($M = 1.19$) with ($S.D = 0.39$), which showed that 89% respondent were from private sector and 19% from public sector organizations. The mean of position ($M = 1.92$) with ($S.D = .67$), which showed that 54.3% respondents were middle level managers. The mean of tenure ($M = 2.87$) with ($S.D = 0.89$) and the mean of total experience ($M = 1.35$) with ($S.D = 0.77$).

Correlations

The correlation results are given in Table 2. The results showed that perception of politics was positively related with job stress ($r = 0.226, p < 0.001$), intention to quit ($r = 0.136, p < 0.05$) and contextual performance ($r = 0.183, p < 0.001$) and negatively related with affective commitment ($r = -0.054, ns$), while the political skill was negatively related with job stress ($r = -0.027, ns$) and positively related with affective commitment ($r = 0.179, p < 0.001$), intension to quit ($r = 0.033, ns$) and contextual performance ($r = 0.266, p < 0.001$).

Regression

Table 3 shows the results of regression analysis for perception of politics and political skills with job outcomes. The results supported first hypothesis revealing a positive and significant relationship between POP and job stress ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$). It explained 5% unique variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.05, p < 0.001$) in job stress. The results did not support the second hypothesis that perception of politics is negatively related with affective commitment. The third hypothesis was proved with a positive and significant relationship between POP and intention to quit ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.05$). It explained 2% unique variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < 0.05$) in intention to quit. The fourth hypothesis predicted that perception of politics is negatively related with contextual performance but the results showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between perception of politics and contextual performance ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$) and explained 3% unique variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.01$) in contextual performance. The fifth hypothesis predicted that political skill is negatively related with job stress, but it was not supported by study results. The sixth hypothesis proposed that political skill is negatively related with affective commitment. But the results were opposite and revealed a positive significant relation between political skills and affective commitment ($\beta = .18, p < 0.01$). It explained 3% unique variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.01$) in affective commitment.

The seventh hypothesis predicted that political skill is negatively related to intention to quit and it was not supported. The eighth hypothesis proposed that political skill positively related to contextual performance and result showed a highly significant relationship to support this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$) and explained 6% unique variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.06, p < 0.01$) in contextual performance.

Table 2. Correlation.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Gender													
Age	0.038												
Qualification	0.046	0.211**											
Organization	-0.002	-0.051	0.108										
Position	0.021	0.258**	0.481**	0.017									
C_Employment	0.052	0.577**	0.220**	-0.131*	0.261**								
W_Experiance	0.049	0.715**	0.133*	-0.079	0.020	0.705**							
POP	0.031	-0.015	-0.102	-0.109**	-0.121*	0.074	0.022	(0.71)					
PS	0.268**	0.201**	0.127*	0.042	-0.115*	0.107	0.344**	0.119*	(0.89)				
JS	-0.032	0.024	-0.074	-0.085	-0.027	0.004	-0.001	0.226**	-0.027	(0.70)			
AC	0.039	0.061	-0.009	-0.044	0.007	-0.002	0.068	-0.054	0.179**	0.068	(0.70)		
ITQ	0.044	-0.115*	-0.192**	-0.057	-0.152**	-0.093	-0.029	0.136*	0.033	0.099	-0.015	(0.71)	
CP	-0.039	0.065	-0.032	-0.090	-0.069	0.072	0.131*	0.183**	0.266**	0.135*	0.009	-0.095	(0.91)

N = 300. Reliabilities are given in Bold. POP = Perception of organizational politics, PS = Political skill, JS = Job stress, AC = Affective commitment, ITQ = Intention to quit, CP = Contextual performance. * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$ and *** = $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Regression.

Predictor	JS			AC			ITO			CP		
	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step: 1												
Control variable		0.06			0.01			0.04			00.2	
Step: 2												
POP	0.23***	0.06	0.05***	-0.05	0.01	0.00	0.12*	0.06	0.02*	0.18**	0.05	0.03**
PS	-0.02	0.03	0.00	0.18**	0.04	0.03**	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.26***	0.08	0.06***

N = 300, POP = Perception of organizational politics, PS = Political skill. * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$ and *** = $p < 0.001$.

Moderation

The Table 4 shows the results of moderation analysis for perception of organizational politics and political skill with job outcomes. We used moderation analysis to test the moderator hypothesis.

The control variables were entered in the 1st step. In the 2nd step, independent and the moderator variables were entered followed by a product term of independent and moderator variable (POP x PS) was entered. For the moderation analysis, we centered the variables by subtracting the overall mean of each variable from its values.

The ninth hypothesis predicated that political skill moderate the relationship between perception of organizational politics and job stress. However the results showed that there was no significant relationship between them *(β = 0.01, ns).* The

Table 4. Moderation.

Predictor	JS			AC			ITO			CP		
	β	R^2	ΔR^2	B	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step: 1												
Control variable		0.06			0.01			0.04			0.02	
Step: 2												
POP	0.23***	0.06	0.05***	-0.05	0.01	0.00	0.12*	0.06	0.02*	0.18**	0.05	0.03**
PS	-0.02	0.03	0.00	0.18**	0.04	0.03**	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.26***	0.08	0.06***
Step: 3												
POPxPS	0.01	0.06	0.00	-0.10	0.05	0.01	0.13*	0.07	0.01*	0.15*	0.12	0.02*

N = 300, POP = Perception of organizational politics, PS = Political skill; * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$ and *** = $p < 0.001$.
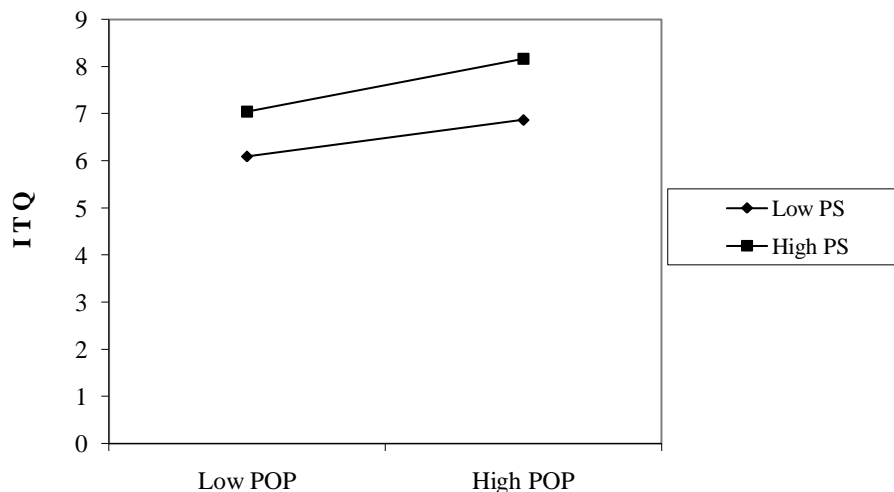

Figure 2. POP = Perception of organizational politics, PS = Political skill, ITQ = Intention to quit

tenth hypothesis predicted the moderating effect of political skill between perception of organizational politics and affective commitment. The results revealed that political skill did not significantly moderated the relationship between perception of organizational politics and affective commitment ($β = -0.10$, ns).

The eleventh hypothesis predicated the mo-derating effect of political skill between perception of organizational politics and intention to quit. The results showed that political skill positively moderated the relationship between perception of organization politics and intention to quit ($β = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$). It explained 1% unique variance $(\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $p < 0.05)$ in intention to quit. The results of twelve hypothesis showed that political skill positively moderated the relationship between perception of politics and contextual performance ($β = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$) and explained 2% unique variance $(\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p < 0.5)$ in contextual performance.

In this study, the plots of significant interactions have

been generated for high and low value of moderator (M ± S.D). Figure 2 portrays that perception of organizational politics "POP" and intention to quit "ITQ" relation was stronger in case of higher political skill "PS" as compared to low political skill, which shows combined positive relationship of both constructs with intention to quit. Figure 3 portrays that perception of organizational politics and contextual performance "CP" relationship was weaker in case of high political skill. So, these findings provide clear support for moderation H_{11} and H_{12} of this study.

DISCUSSION

The contribution of this study is exploration of combined effects of perception of organization politics and political skill on different job outcomes like job stress, affective commitment, intention to quit and contextual
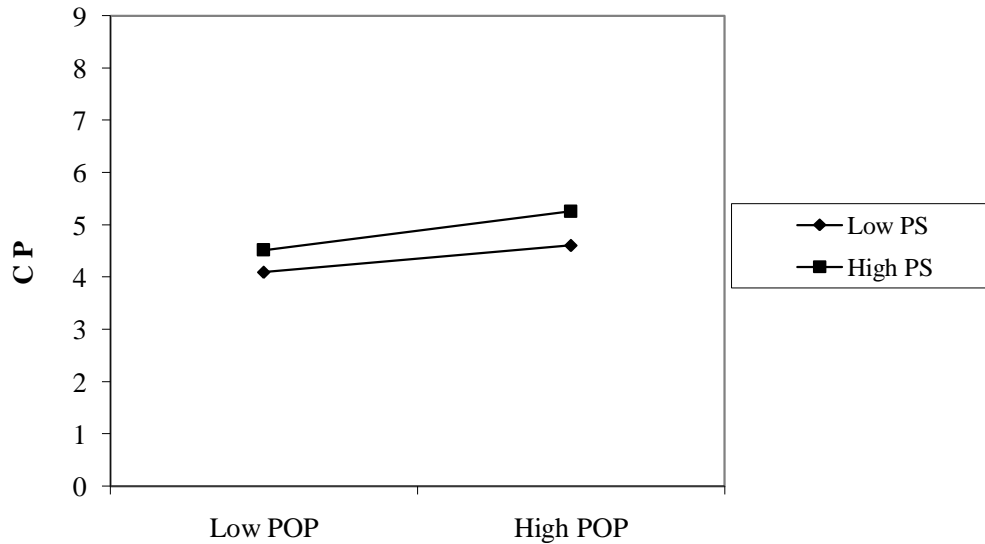
Figure 3. POP = Perception of organizational politics, PS = Political skill, CP = Contextual performance.

performance. This research will provide information to employees that how efficiently political skills will reduce job stress, affective commitment and intention to quit and increase contextual performance.

The first hypothesis revealed that perception of politics was positively and significantly related with job stress. These results are consistent with Chang et al. (2009). The second hypothesis did not revealed significant support. The third hypothesis was accepted and consistent with findings of Chang et al. (2009). The fourth hypothesis revealed opposite results as per our prediction. This could be a surprising finding especially in Pakistani collectivist culture. This finding is one of the valuable contributions of this study.

The fifth hypothesis was not supported in our study results. Instead of proposed negative relationship, our results revealed positive association of political skill with affective commitment. For hypothesis six, this major change may be due to difference in cultural responses of Pakistani respondents. In this culture people with high political skill tend to be more committed with organization as compared to people low on political skill. The seventh hypothesis did not reveal significant support in our results. The eighth hypothesis was supported with strong empirical evidence.

The results of the ninth and tenth hypothesis of moderation between perception of politics and job stress, affective commitment did not revealed significant results in our study. Hypothesis eleven and twelve of the study were supported in which political skill significantly moderated to decrease intention to quit and to increase contextual performance. In this scenario this study revealed insight for practitioners and human resource managers that political skill should also be assessed while hiring new employees along with other

selection measures because this study shows significant combined effects of perception of politics and political skill on employee job outcomes. Higher level of political skill may play a vital role in buffering negative effects on the job. In turn the employee with higher level of political skill may be a better performer as compared to employee with lower level of political skill.

Conclusion

It is evident that politics is a universal phenomenon and no organization exists, where politics and its perception is not present. So, managers can only try to minimize its effects on employee and organizational outcomes. Based on conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 2002), this study pitched the idea of the importance of political skill, how that play an important role in minimizing negative effects of politics perception on employee job outcomes; how organizations can focus on developing political skill in employees through training and development to get benefit in the form of buffering mechanism. How human resource managers can use these findings to assess the political capabilities of new hires at the time of selection and recruitment. This study could be an effort to change the mindset of managers that politics is always harmful. In this scenario, it is evident that combined effects of politics perception and political skill predicated higher levels of contextual performance and lower levels of intention to quit.

FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study has several managerial implications and future

research ideas as well. This research highlighted the importance of political skill in predication of employee outcomes and as a buffering mechanism to reduce negative effects of perception of politics on employee outcomes.

This study has insight for human resource managers that they can use political skill as determinant of higher level of performance when they are in process of recruitment and selection. A longitudinal study is recommended to check the political skill of new hires at times of selection and their comparison of performance on later stage of time 2, and time 3. Another study is required in Eastern context to investigate the differences in political skill and affective commitment as well as contextual performance in Eastern context. Investigation of the role of political skill in prediction of different HR and OB outcomes is recommended in future.

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