Social Awareness (SA) as a Buffer: Examining the Association Between Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) and Resentment

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Abstract

Perceived organizational politics (POP) is a widespread yet underexplored phenomenon that notably affects individuals' well-being and organizational outcomes. This study examines how social awareness mitigates the negative impact of organizational politics and resentment. Based on conservation of resources (COR) and affective events theories, this study postulates that higher levels of POP foster feelings of resentment amongst individuals within the work environment. By employing a quantitative approach, we collected data from individuals in the IT industry. Results shed light on the emotional mechanisms through which workplace politics cause resentment, offering intuitions into the significance of mitigating resentment to promote an improved work environment. Practical suggestions corporate strategies for decreasing organizational politics and promoting emotional resilience to augment overall employee productivity and engagement. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on workplace dynamics by highlighting the critical role of emotions in modeling employee outcomes.

Keywords: Organizational politics, resentment, social awareness, quantitative study

Introduction

Organizational politics is a phenomenon in workplaces and has harvested substantial attention in organizational behavior (OB) research. Perceived organizational politics (POP), defined as individuals' perception of self-serving behavior that may challenge combined organizational goals and justice, has been associated with a plethora of hostile consequences. These comprise decreased organizational commitment, reduced job satisfaction, and intensified turnover intentions (Ferris et al., 2019; Bedi et al., 2020; Meisler, Galit., 2024). Individuals

exposed to higher levels of perceived politics often encounter amplified stress because of the discriminations and uncertainties of this environment (Chang et al., 2020; Meisler, Galit., 2024). This elongated stress can lead to feelings of resentment, affecting both individual well-being and organizational outcomes. These perceptions, even when not supported in factual data, can trigger negative emotional and behavioral responses among employees. Amongst these responses, resentment a deep-rooted feeling of unfair treatment, injustice, and dissatisfaction has appeared as a critical consequence (Gibney et al., 2016).

Resentment, 'a multiplex emotional reaction differentiated by feelings of unfair treatment, injustice, and hostility' is one of such unexplored mechanisms (Gibney et al., 2016; Meisler, Galit., 2024). Resentment frequently develops when individuals perceive organizational politics as biased, cultivating a sense of emotional strain and powerlessness. This emotional reciprocation can be portrayed as an outcome of POP. When resentment, unaddressed, can shrink collaboration, erode trust and harm overall organizational effectiveness (Chang et al., 2020; Hochwarter et al., 2021). The association between POP and resentment has not been explored till date.However, the grievousness of this emotional response may not be consistent among individuals, suggesting the influence of moderating factors. Among these moderating factors, social awareness is a key component of social intelligence, which denotes to an individual's competence to perceive, infer, and respond effectively to the needs and emotions of others (Goleman, 2006).

Social awareness has the potential to buffer the hostile impacts of POP by facilitating individuals to better identify the drives behind political behavior and contextualize it in broader organizational goals (Lopes et al., 2018). With high social awareness individuals are likely to display greater adaptability and emotional resilience, in the face of perceived discrimination and injustice, thus mitigating the probability of developing resentment. Equally, individuals with lower social awareness may struggle to pilot the complications of perceived organizational political (POP), perceiving such behaviors as personal outrages and nurturing greater emotional distress.The current study targets to address this gap by examining how Social Awareness moderates the association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and resentment. By utilizing a robust theoretical framework and empirical testing, this study has an objective to contribute to a

deeper understanding of the moderating effect of social awareness (SA) on the association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and resentment. Particularly, it seeks to determine whether higher levels of social awareness (SA) can weaken the negative effect of POP on resentment. By assessing this interaction, the study not only addresses a significant gap in literature but also specifies practical insights for administrators and supervisors to foster an improved work culture by modifying the negative effects of organizational politics.

Literature Review

Conceptualization of Perceived Organizational Politics

Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) is defined as the idea that self-interested behaviors drive the organizational context in an effort to gain certain benefits at the cost of fairness and organizational goals (Ferris et al., 1989). These perceptions develop when an individual notices acts like favoritism, manipulation, hidden support groups, or some people taking advantage of authority, which the employee perceives as unfair and thus loses trust in the organization.POP is not a mere state of affairs, though it is constructed by and for persons and depends on the context. Analyses of the effect of individual difference variables indicated that self-efficacy scores, trait anxiety, and predisposition to perceive the environment negatively were positively related to perceptions of organizational politics among employees. Newcomer studies have also highlighted various individual attributes that lead to such perceptions, including high system inertial, lack of co-worker support, and high perceived organizational injustice; at the same time, the existing organizational factors encompassed include poor communication structures, little opportunity to voice, and high uncertainty.

A Conservation of Resources (COR) Theoretical Perspective, the combined interaction of these two constructs provides a holistic lens through which to examine the interplay between multiple forces that can take place within organizational contexts and the relationship between such dynamics on employee behavior and worker well-being (Zhou & Liu, 2023). This research integrates recent studies in order to demonstrate how these two crucial constructs interrelate on the organizational behavior landscape.Research has provided insight into the complexities of this relationship between POP and conservation. In fact, a study from 2021 actualized the role of POP on resource depletion and burnout (Charoensukmongkol, 2023). This insight highlights the importance of exercising resource management to reduce the negative consequences of organizational

politics. POP forms a stressful social environment that drains employees' resources, resulting in adverse consequences such as low job satisfaction and high turnover intentions (Liu et al., 2021). Stress is realized when any of these resources are threatened, missing, or not adequately restored. In the context of POP, employees perceive the political environment as a significant threat to their resources.

Resentment

Resentment as a reaction to POP is of particular interest since the emotional and psychological impact of POP creates fertile ground for resentment to blossom. The pathway from the dynamics of POP to the development of resentment is not random but follows logically from theoretical and empirical examination of organizational behavior as previously outlined. Due to its aspects of bias, non-transparency, and community formation, POP frequently invokes scenarios of injustice, unfairness, and side-lining (Malik & Pichler, 2022). The combination of these perceptions and drawn-out resource depletion, as COR Theory explains (Conservation of Resources), sets the stage for resentment (Dudek et al., 2007).

The expression of this resentment is more than an emotional response; it can be a reaction developed after prolonged exposure to unfair and politically charged environments. Resentment is not the knee-jerk response to an episode of frustration or anger; it comes cumulative over time as employees are repeatedly exposed to situations they view as unfair or inequitable (Meisler et al., 2019). POP does the hard work to build that slow-burn rage. Favoritism destroys trust and equity, opaqueness creates ambiguity and powerlessness, while coalition-building causes out-group or group exclusion and marginalization (Nazir et al., 2023). Individually, none of these dimensions cause irreparable harm, but together, they evolve an environment that makes employees feel disempowered and unappreciated, thus driving the evolution of resentment (Malik & Pichler, 2024).

According to COR theory, humans are motivated to obtain, safeguard, and retain resources, including emotional vitality, social support, and job security (Dudek et al., 2007). Employees become stressed and frustrated when they feel there is a continual political environment that threatens these resources with no perspective to be replenished (Tse, 2021). Eventually, this evolves into resentment as employees internalize the narrative that the organization had a hand in their

resource depletion. In order to elaborate more on how certain types of resentment express themselves in organizational environments, it would be good to clarify these. Situational, chronic, and dispositional each have unique origins and characteristics, making them necessitate different forms of management and intervention. This classification offers a conceptual framework through which we can look at resentment and how it plays out within organizations.

Social Awareness a subdimension of Social Intelligence

Social Intelligence (SI) has emerged as a vital construct in understanding how individuals navigate complex social environments, especially in organizational settings. A crucial component of Social Intelligence (SI) is social awareness (SA), that encompasses perceiving and understanding the emotions, intentions, and behaviors of other individuals within a social framework. This literature review comprises of the conceptualization of social awareness, and its role in professional settings, and its developmental facet, outlined upon latest literary work.

Conceptualization of Social Awareness (SA)

Social awareness (SA) is termed as the competency to correctly perceive and understand the social cues and emotional states of other individuals. According to Goleman (2006), social awareness (SA) incorporates social cognition, empathy, and empathic accuracy. These aspects facilitate individuals to pilot social complexities by identifying other individuals' feelings thus assisting effective social interactions. Social awareness (SA) presumes identifying situational perspectives and the dynamics of social interactions, which are critical for social problem-solving and compliance (Cantor et el.,1987). A core element of social awareness (SA) is 'empathy' that states the capability to identify and share the feelings of others. A cohesive literature review highlights that individuals holding high empathic behavior and social intelligence can evaluate situations from the viewpoints of others, steering to successful interpersonal engagements (Howe, 2017). This empathic understanding is crucial for building trust and rapport in various social settings.

Theoretical framework and study Hypotheses
Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) and Resentment (H1)

Affective Events Theory (AET), developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), emphasizes that workplace events trigger emotional responses, which influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. According to AET, POP can be viewed as a negative workplace event that provokes adverse emotional reactions among individuals. These emotions stem from a sense of injustice and disempowerment, as employees may feel that their efforts are undermined by political maneuvering rather than rewarded on merit. Among these negative emotions Resentment is one. Resentment, as a reaction to the perceived inequity and lack of transparency, becomes a natural emotional response within AET's framework. AET explains the immediate emotional reaction to POP. Thus, this theory effectively postulates:

Hypothesis 1: *Perceived organizational politics (POP) positively linked to Resentment.*

Moderating impact of Social Awareness (SA) between the relationship of POP and Resentment

Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) is a significant predictor of resentment and Social Awareness (SA) is found to mediate the association between Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) and resentment. Employees with high Social Awareness (SA) can cope with social demands including political behaviors with low level of resentment intensity. COR Theory suggest that Social Awareness (SA) is psychological capital that enable employees to save and replenish emotional reserves. It was found that HI- SA employees tend to transform the political behaviors into a constructive manner by not perceiving it as a threat. This cognitive flexibility allows them to regulate stress and to avert the costs of resentment on the employee (Hobfoll, 1989). Drory and Meisler (2016) found evidence that Social Awareness (SA) a sub-dimension of Social Intelligence has a negative relationship with negative emotional reactions towards POP and promotes coping and usurps in work related well-being.

Hypothesis 2: Social Awareness (SA) will moderate the relationship between Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) and resentment. This relationship will be weaker for individuals with high Social Awareness (SA) levels than for those with lower levels of it, resulting in less job burnout in the former.

The present study has benefited from using the COR theory and the AET as the theories selected to create a firm theoretical background for the analysis of the POP-resentment relationship. This integration was supposed to yield the best explanation

of workplace stress than offered by either theory, since it included the emotional and the resource-based perspective of stress.
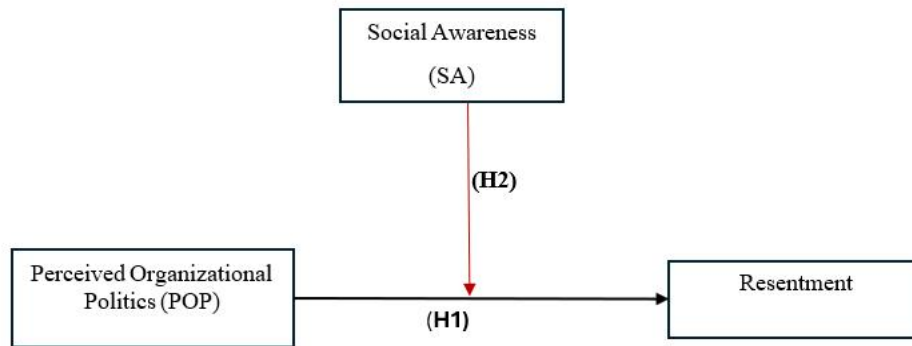

Fig: Hypnotized Moderated Model

Method
Sample and procedure
We collected data for this study from 340 employees in the IT industry who are engaged in different private sector software houses. The participants were full-time employees who had worked in their current jobs for at least one year. This study adopts a cross-sectional approach, as data was collected at a single point in time. The personal demographics of the participants varied a great deal. They held different positions in various departments. Moreover, they ranged from junior level software engineers to senior principal software engineer and managers. Among 340 respondent's male respondents were 279 showing 82.1% of the entire sample, whereas 61 were female respondents comprising 17.9% of the total sample size. Respondents were divided into four experience strata 1 year, 2 years, 3 years and 4 and above. below 25 years to 55 and above 55 years. There were 71 respondents (20.9%) having 1 year working tenure. 134 respondents (39.4%) have 2 years of working tenure, 115 respondents (33.8%) have 3 years of working tenure, and 20 respondents (5.9%) have 4 and above working tenure. The frequency analysis of work experience shows that most participants belonged to the strata of 2 years of working tenure. Besides, frequency analysis of the marital status shows that most of the respondents, i.e., 246 (72.4%) were married out of 340 respondents, 91 respondents (26.8%) were single, 3 respondents (1.0%) were divorced.

Measures

The well-established measure was used for measurement of variables in this study.

Perceived Organizational Politics

A 6-item scale of Hochwarter et al. (2003) is used to measure POP. *"Individuals are stabbing each other in the back to look good in front of others"* is a sample item for the measurement of POP. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale: from 1 (never true) to 5 (always true). Recent studies Meisler, G. (2023); Addisu et al., (2024), used this scale to measure POP and their reliability was 0.92.

Resentment

6-adapted items from short gratitude and happiness scale of Watkins et al., (2003) is used to evaluate resentment. Sample items of this scale comprise *"Compared to my fellow group member, more bad things have happened to me in this group than I deserve"* and *"For some reason I don't get the benefits that others* utilize *do."* Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree (5) Strongly agree.

Social Awareness

To measure Social Awareness (SA) we used 4- items taken from short scale TSIS developed by Silvera et al., (2001) "Tromosø Social Intelligence Scale" is used to measure social intelligence. TSIS is a self-reported scale used to access SI with items measuring social awareness (SA) *"I find people unpredictable"*. Responses are recorded on 5-Likert scale from: (1) completely disagrees to (5) completely agree. Recent studies e.g. Kim, H., et al., (2023) and Sanwal, T. et al., (2023) utilized this scale in their studies.

Data Analyses

We utilize IBM SPSS (version 23) for frequency analysis, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis. The zero-order associations between the variables were examined using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The internal consistency of study variables, such as perceived organizational politics (POP), resentment and social Awareness (SA), was measured using Cronbach's alpha. A reliability coefficient of about 0.90 is excellent, close to 0.80 is very good and value just about alpha 0.70 is adequate (Kline, 2005). In this study, perceived organizational politics (0.92), resentment (0.95) scales have an excellent level of reliability coefficients. Furthermore, social awareness (0.91) has an adequate level of reliability coefficient. All the values were in an acceptable range, i.e., 0.70 (Kline, 2015).

Correlation Analysis

Table 4.1 showed the correlation results. In line with our proposed relationship, the correlation analysis indicates that perceived organizational politics was positively associated with resentment (r= 0.427, p< 0.01), and negatively associated with social awareness (r= -.40, p< 0.01), Results also showed that there is a negative association between Gender and work experience (r=-0.153, p<0.01) and positive and significant association between marital status and working experience (r=0.134, p<0.05).

Table 4.1
Correlations

Note: n = 340, ** (p < 0.01, two-tailed), * (p < 0.05, two-tailed)

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was executed on the measures of three study variables, i.e., perceived organizational politics (POP), resentment, and social awareness (SA) by employing principal component analysis and varimax rotation (see Table 4.2). The three factors accounted for 66% variance collectively. The results of

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	1.00					
2. Marital Status	-0.08	1.00				
3. Experience	-0.153**	0.134*	1.00			
4. Perceived Organizational Politics (POP)	-0.056	0.041	0.006	1.00		
5. Resentment	0.035	0.019	0.028	0.427**	1.00	
6. Social Awareness (SA)	-0.063	0.001	0.068	-.40**	-.35**	1.00

exploratory factor analysis provide initial support for convergent and discriminant (divergent) validity.

Table 4.2

Factor loadings (Rotated Component Matrix)

	SA	RES	POP
POP1			.781
POP2			.800
POP3			.796
POP4			.795
POP5			.813
POP6			.816
RES1		.839	
RES2		.825	
RES3		.810	
RES4		.732	
RES5		.800	
RES6		.846	
SA1	.797		
SA2	.711		
SA3	.789		
SA4	.819		

Moderation Analysis

The moderation model was analyzed using the PROCESS procedure for SPSS Version 23 (Hayes, 2017). The results are depicted in Table-4.3, which showed a significant main effect of POP on resentment (b = 1.085, p < .001). The interaction term (POP × Social Awareness) was also significant (b = −0.182, p = .0014), indicating that social awareness moderates the relationship between POP and resentment. The interaction explained an additional 3.5% of the variance in resentment (ΔR² = 0.024, F (1, 336) = 10.4138, p = .0014. The inclusion of the interaction term remarkably improves the model, reinforce that the moderating effect of social awareness (SA) is statistically significant.

Table 4.3 Effects of Hypothesized Model

Predictor	β	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	-0.38	0.65	-0.59	0.55	-1.67	-.046
POP	1.085	0.192	5.63	0.00	0.706	1.464
SA	0.609	0.193	3.158	0.001	0.230	0.989
Interaction (POP × SI)	-0.182	0.056	-3.22	0001	-0.293	-0.071

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the moderating role of social awareness (SA) on the association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and resentment. The results specify significant insights into how organizational dynamic forces and individual attributes interact to impact individual's emotional responses.

Key Findings

The findings surfaced a significant positive association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and resentment, coherent with previous research (Ferris et al., 2019; Hochwarter et al., 2020). This suggests that individuals perceiving higher levels of politics in their work setting are more likely to experience resentment. Perceived organizational politics (POP), often portrayed as manipulation, favoritism, and self-serving behaviors, fostering a sense of dissatisfaction and injustice, leading to amplified resentment among individuals.

The interaction between perceived organizational politics (POP) and social awareness (SA) was also substantial, demonstrating that social awareness (SA) serves as a buffer against the hostile impacts of perceived organizational politics (POP). Specifically, at higher levels of social awareness (SA), the effect of perceived organizational politics (POP) on resentment was drastically weaker, as supported by the conditional effects at various percentiles of SA. These results align with the theory that socially aware individuals are better capable of navigating complex interpersonal and organizational dynamics (Goleman, 2006). Individuals with higher SA possess the capability to interpret and respond adaptively to social cues, mitigating the emotional strain of political behaviors in the workplace.

Theoretical Contributions

Findings of this study contribute to the developing body of literature on the psychological effects of organizational politics by highlighting the moderating role of social awareness. While previous studies (e.g., Meisler et al., 2017) have established social intelligence as a critical factor in promoting emotional resilience, this study extends that understanding by demonstrating its moderating effect in a high-politics context. This study highlights the importance of integrating individual-level traits, such as social awareness, into models examining the consequences of organizational politics.

Practical Implications

Findings of this study also underscore the need for organizations to address the prevalence of political behaviors and foster environments where fairness and transparency prevail. Moreover, training programs aimed at enhancing individuals' interpersonal skills such as social awareness could serve as a protective mechanism, assisting them to manage the stressors associated with organizational politics more effectively. HR professionals and leaders should consider incorporating SA assessments and development programs into their talent management practices to mitigate resentment and promote employee well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without limitations, despite its contributions. Firstly, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality. Longitudinal study design could provide more robust insights into the temporal dynamics of POP, SA, and resentment. Secondly, the dependency on self-reported data may introduce common method bias, although the significant interaction effect reduces concerns about such bias. Future research could use multi-source data or experimental designs to strengthen the validity of these findings.Future researchers might also investigate other potential moderators, such as organizational support or emotional intelligence, to further understand the complex relationship of factors affecting employees' responses to organizational politics. Moreover, investigating cultural differences in the perception and impact of organizational politics could produce valuable insights, given that political behaviors are likely inspired by cultural norms and values.

Conclusion

Last but not least, this study underscores the critical role of social awareness in mitigating the negative emotional outcomes of perceived organizational politics. By equipping employees with the skills to navigate and manage interpersonal dynamics effectively, organizations can foster a healthier work environment and reduce the likelihood of resentment. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing both organizational and individual factors to promote employee well-being and productivity.

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