

Does the leadership style influence the office politics in performance appraisal? Empirical study from Malaysian financial sector

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Abstract: Employees play a pivotal role in the Malaysian financial industry, as this sector requires individuals capable of meeting the demands of the global financial market and enhancing Malaysia's position as a leading international financial hub. Consequently, employees' behavior and practices can significantly impact the institution's reputation. Previous research has identified office politics as a detrimental factor in organizational performance, prompting this study to investigate the impact of leadership styles on organizational politics within the context of performance appraisal. A survey was conducted through the distribution of questionnaires among 274 officers and clerical staff, selected using proportionate stratified random sampling from a Malaysian government financial institution based in Kuala Lumpur. Of the distributed questionnaires, 105 were completed and deemed usable. The study identified three reliable dimensions of politics in performance appraisal: acquiring benefits, human relations, and control. In examining leadership styles, the study found that the integrative leadership style was the only reliable dimension. Correlation analysis revealed that integrative leadership style generally correlates significantly and negatively with politics in performance appraisal. Specifically, integrative leadership style had a significant negative impact on the human relations and control dimensions. Regression analysis further indicated that integrative leadership style significantly and negatively influenced only the control dimension of performance appraisal politics. The study discusses the implications of these findings for future research and practice, as well as the limitations of the current study.

Keywords: *Exploratory factor analysis; Industrial relations; office politics errors; Integrative leadership, Performance appraisal,*

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of work system requires adequate human resources; hence employees are crucial in the financial industry as this industry needs individuals who can complement the needs of the global financial market and contribute to strengthening Malaysia's position as an international financial hub (Ibrahim et al., 2020). The critical stakeholders of a financial institution are their employees; thus, their conduct and practices can expose the institution to reputational risk (Ali & Kasim, 2019).

On the meantime leadership represents a psychological contract between a leader and his followers that he will try his best to guide them, to protect them and to treat them fairly and with justice (Samsudin, 2018). Leadership can be defined as a dynamic relationship based on mutual understanding and common purpose between leaders and employees in which both are moved to higher levels of motivation and moral development as they affect organizational objectives and intended change, at the same time, leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the

motivations (Maharani et al., 2020). Moreover, in appraising employee's performance, leader must refer to employee's key performance index and avoid any discrimination in performance appraisal, behavior such as politics that involves the exploitation of power may direct to unjust result and create conflict in industrial relations (Weissenberger, 2010).

Organizational politics, often referred to as office politics, involves the strategic manipulation of power and authority to foster relationships and achieve desired outcomes, often at the expense of others. In essence, it can be seen as using underhanded tactics to meet objectives. Organizational politics involves the exercise of personal or positional power within an organization to gain advantages that extend beyond one's formal authority. These advantages may include access to tangible resources or intangible benefits such as enhanced status or pseudo-authority, which can influence the actions and decisions of others. Both individuals and groups may participate in such political behavior within the organizational context., the organizational politics become a disease in performance management (Daud et al., 2023). Amit and Manjari (2007) maintained that politics in performance management may fulfill the assessors' short-term goals but it hurts the employee in the long run by jeopardizing performance culture, demoralizing genuine performers and discrediting pay for performance policies. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the influence of leadership styles.

1.1. Integrative Leadership Styles

Transparency in organizational policies and rules and regulations are vital to create satisfaction among employees in their job and this notion eliminates any uncertainties in execution of performance management so that all employees will satisfy with the result of their performance appraisal (Prasetya and Kato, 2011). Various studies on organizational politics including Rozhan Othman (2009) and Labedo (2006) have found that organizational politics drove job ambiguity and created negative trust climate, as well as bias in performance management may happen when the superior perceives that everybody may make a same mistake, hence judging employee's performance this kind of bias may also direct to the perception of political game by employee towards the employer.

In determining styles in leadership, this study employed Blake and Mouton leadership styles. Blake and Mouton's dual dimensional model for handling interpersonal conflict has given rise to several theoretical approaches dealing with modes or styles in conflict management for example Thomas and Kilmann (1974) and Rahim (1983), as well as empirical research designed to evaluate these styles for example Munduate, Ganaza, Peiro, Euwema (1999).

Integrative style of leadership or the 9,9 style of leadership according to quadrant suggested by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) and Rahim (1983) is a synergistic theory of behavior. In interpersonal conflict management, Rahim (1983) has defined this style as integration resolution style. Effective integration between managers and subordinates in organizational politics is possible by involving subordinates' ideas in determining the conditions and strategies of work. There are the needs of people to think, applying mental effort in productive work and establishing mature relationships to accomplish organizational requirements. The basic aim for integrative style is to promote the conditions that integrate creativity, high productivity and high morale through concerted team actions. The integrative manager believes that mutual understanding and agreement on organizational goals are the means to be attained for work direction (Blake & Mouton, 1968).

As per Blake & Mouton (1968) the Integrative manager is responsible to plan, direct and control his subordinates' works in an attempt to reach organizational mission, he gets relevant facts from his employees, establishes goals and setting up workers' responsibilities, then when conflicts occur, the integrative manager will identify the problem, revising goal and assists worker who needed help to remove road blocks, also in the implementation of tasks, the manager will make follow-up by evaluating how the job went and when the job has been done effectively, thus the integrative manager will give recognition on a team basis as well as recognizing outstanding individual contributions.

1.2. Performance Appraisal

Recently, performance appraisal becomes one of the important functions in managing human resources. This performance is called contextual performance and refers to outcomes of employees' behaviors that are needed to support the organization's strategies and mission (Witt, Kacmar, Carlson, Zivnuska, 2002). Furthermore, this human resource management activity indicates the performance of employee in comparing with his key performance index. To accomplish the multiple goals of performance appraisals, most organizations are leaning toward a continuous program of performance management that is particularly important to both the professional success of an organization and the personal advancement of its employees (Guest, 1997).

Although performance appraisal helps organization to indicate the level of performance of employees and assists in order to determine the corrective actions if the performance showed by the employees was deviate from their key performance index, this activity is questionable in terms of its fair and justice (Saeed and Shahbaz, 2011). Performance appraisal outcomes are often affected by various biases that compromise the fairness and accuracy of evaluations. These biases include unclear standards, where performance criteria are vague; the halo effect, where one positive trait overly influences overall ratings; central tendency, in which raters avoid extreme scores and rate most employees as average; strictness and leniency, reflecting consistently harsh or lenient evaluations; and stereotyping, where appraisals are influenced by generalized assumptions about individuals rather than their actual performance. (Dessler, 2005). As these biases involve discrimination and manipulation of power, they may create politics in performance management (Longenecker, Sims and Gioia, 1987). Hence, this study attempts to investigate the existence of organizational politics in performance management.

1.3. Office Politics

Contextual performance refers to outcomes of behaviors that are needed to support the social fabric of the organization (Witt, Kacmar, Carlson, Zivnuska, 2002). Ferris and Kacmar, (1992) stated that evidence from previous research have showed that personal experience and perceptions have supported a general belief that behavior in and of organizations is often political in nature. Parker, Dipboye, Jackson (1995) have indicated that among the human resource practices that are always influenced by politicking activities are career development opportunities, reward and recognition and cooperation among work groups. They added, the perception of organization politics is truly a significant dimension of individuals' perception of their work environment. Such perception could lead to a decrease on Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Parker, Dipboye, Jackson, 1995).

This politicking behavior influences the distribution of advantages and disadvantages in organization (Robbins, 2001). Modern organizations are described as political systems that are characterized by diversity, scarcity of resources, groups or personal interests, and disagreements that result in conflict (Ladebo, 2006). As maintained by Chang Rosen, Levy (2009), perceptions of organizational politics have indirect effects on turnover intentions and performance through more immediate outcomes for example strain and morale. The research demonstrated that if the activities are perceived as political based on favoritism and self-interest, then it may have extensive negative effects on organization members. Chang Rosen, Levy (2009) also indicated that employees' respond negatively to work conditions that indicate politics. Parker also found the same result, Dipboye, Jackson (1995), by using zero-order correlation, the authors judged that perceiving the organizational as political was associated with a variety of negative outcomes including:

- a. having lower overall satisfaction,
- b. believing that the organization does not value high work standards, challenging work and integrity,
- c. evaluating senior management as ineffective
- d. perceiving that the organization does not support innovation and
- e. believing that employees are not loyal to the organization

Employees hold diverse views regarding organizational politics. While politics often carry a negative perception (Dhar, 2009), it can also be instrumental in securing cooperation from subordinates or peers to accomplish tasks, as it involves persuasion (Chang, Rosen, Levy, 2009; Robbins, 2001).

Political influence processes may also serve to preserve the status quo even when change is necessary. The impact of political behavior on an organization, whether beneficial or detrimental, often hinges more on perceptions than on objective reality (Parker, Dipboye, Jackson, 1995). Perceptions and reactions to organizational politics may be influenced by cultural factors, suggesting that theories of organizational politics should account for the cultural context of each study. In organizations with limited resources, heightened levels of politicking are often observed, as key actors compete to secure a fair share of those scarce resources for themselves and their units (Ladebo, 2006).

1.4. Office Politics in Performance Appraisal

Ferris and Kacmar, (1992) stated that evidence from previous research have showed that personal experience and perceptions have supported a general belief that behavior in and of organizations is often political in nature. Parker, Dipboye, Jackson (1995) have indicated that among the human resource practices that are always influenced by politicking activities are career development opportunities, reward and recognition and cooperation among work groups. They added, the perception of organization politics is truly a significant dimension of individuals' perception of their work environment. As performance appraisal involves communication between superior and subordinates, this function may affect by organizational politics. Performance appraisal must be seen as fair because this result from performance appraisal is used to plan other human resource management functions. Results from performance appraisal is used for career development, compensation management, and planning training programs for employees as well as its motivational effect on workers' performance (Ikemefuna and Chidi, 2012).

As maintained by Chang Rosen, Levy (2009), perceptions of organizational politics have indirect effects on turnover intentions and performance through more immediate outcomes for example strain and morale. The research demonstrated that if the activities are perceived as political, for example based on favoritism and self-interest, then it may have extensive negative effects on organization members. This finding has been supported by a study performed by Lee and Peccei (2011) where this study has found that in political environment, the level of employees' individual organizational citizenship behavior (OSBI) is low. Employees will not trust the performance appraisal result if organizational politics become the main issue in an organization. This has been maintained by Sharabi, Arian and Simonovich (2012) in their comparative study between a high-tech workers and public workers in Israel where lack of transparency which is due to organizational politics made the employees especially in public sector were not satisfied with promotion activity and performance appraisal. Hence, in general, it can be said that employees will respond negatively to work conditions, for instance performance appraisal that influenced by politics.

1.5. Integrative Leadership Style, Office Politics and Performance Appraisal

Employees expect a just performance appraisal by their immediate leader. It can be said that the perception of employees toward their leader's decision on performance appraisal may affect the interaction between them. Thurston Jr. and McNall (2009) indicated that it has been a long time since justice in performance appraisal has been discussed. They suggested that the leaders must have a knowledge and understanding on the expectation of employees on performance appraisal system so that they can modify the performance appraisal to be a fair tool that represents employees' performance. Gupta and Kumar (2013) exhibited that distributive and informational justice perception amongst employees toward performance appraisal decision effected their work engagement and well-being. Gupta and Kumar (2013) also have suggested due-process for a fair performance appraisal including (a) adequate notice – the management has to establish, distribute and explain performance standard; and giving timely feedback on performance appraisal result, (b) fair hearing – leaders must conduct a formal review meeting which an employee is notify regarding how the appraisal result was derived and (c) performance appraisal result must base on appropriate evidence. Vigoda-Gadot (2006) has tested the

effect of leadership on employees' performance with organizational politics as mediating variable. The researcher has found that leadership style has direct effect with performance.

Blake and Mouton (1964) who created managerial grid theory established dual dimensions in determining managerial styles namely concern of production and concern of others. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) then utilized these dimensions in measuring modes in handling interpersonal conflict. They produced dual dimensional ideas, namely cooperative and assertive. Seeing that Thomas and Kilmann's (1974) dual dimensional of handling interpersonal was relevant, Rahim (1983) has adapted these dimensions and established his dual dimensional "concern for self" and "concern for others". Rahim (1983) integrated these dimensions to develop five leadership styles for managing conflict: obliging, integrative, compromising, dominating, and avoiding.

2. Research Objectives

In the previous study (Daud, Elsaman and Rashdan, 2023) indicated office politics as an activity that may ruin employee-employer relationships and turn the office ecosystem unharmonious, then we assessed the dimensions of organizational politics as one more error in the employee's performance appraisal. For that reason, this study main objective to recommend the potential solution to that error, therefore the research integrative leadership style from Malaysian financial sector dimensions proposed as a potential problem solver to this dilemma. Hence, the research objective can be illustrated as follow

- To conceptualize the factors of office politics in performance appraisal.
- To examine the relations between integrative leadership style and performance appraisal.

3. Research Framework

After reviewing the recent and extant literature the research framework can be crafted the relation between the five dimensions leadership styles adopted of Raheem (1983) and three dimensions for office politics in performance appraisal.

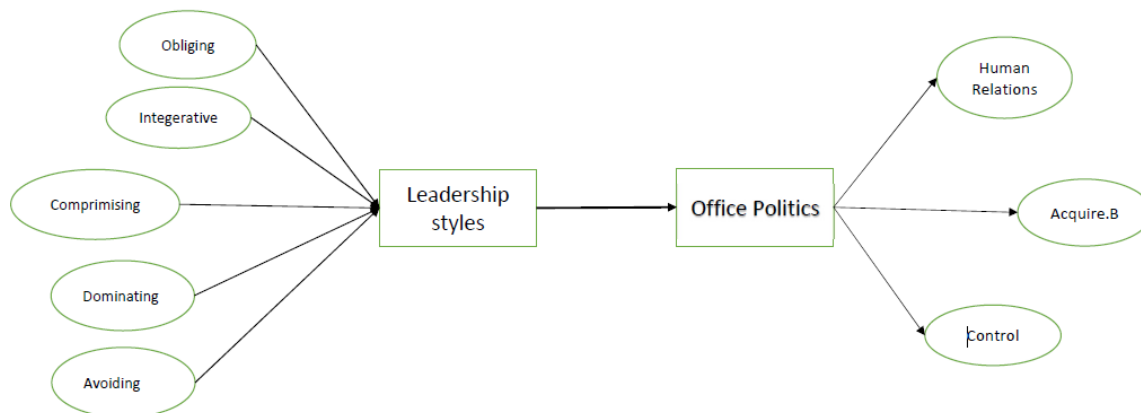


Figure 1.
The research conceptual flowchart.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Design, Population and Sampling

This study utilized a quantitative research approach, employing parametric tests to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Primary data were collected through questionnaires. The sampling process began by defining the sampling frame, followed by stratification of samples. Once stratified samples were identified, respondents were selected through random

sampling. Questionnaires were distributed to evaluate respondents' perceptions of the variables measured. The study adopted various instruments from existing sources, and the reliability of the questionnaire items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (α). Items were clustered into appropriate dimensions within each variable, and factor analysis was conducted to validate the items that represented the dimensions of each variable. The population comprised officers and administrative staff from a Malaysian government financial sector headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, totaling 900 potential respondents. According to the sampling determination table by Krejcie and Morgan, a sample size of 274 was established, with 105 responses obtained and deemed usable.

4.2. Research Instrument

The study was conducted among administrative staff and officers within a Malaysian government-linked company, with a population size of 900. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling determination table, a sample size of 274 was selected using disproportionate stratified random sampling. A total of 274 questionnaires were distributed, of which 105 were completed and usable.

The research employed a 4-point Likert scale, known as a forced-choice scale, to capture respondents' levels of agreement. Hughes (1969) and Roach (1971) noted that this scale can produce a negative bias, as it compels respondents to choose between descriptive items with equal bias components, thereby controlling overall response bias (Bartlett, 1983).

To assess office politics in performance appraisal, the study used the Questionnaire of Political Considerations in Performance Appraisal (QPCPA) by Tziner, Latham, Price, and Haccoun (1996), which comprises 25 items with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.97. Poon (2004) validated this instrument, finding it highly reliable (Cronbach Alpha > 0.8). The Rahim's Organizational Conflict Index (ROCI-II) by Rahim and Magner (1995) was also used to measure the five conflict-handling styles outlined by Rahim (1983), as these styles are relevant in understanding conflicts stemming from performance appraisal politics. The ROCI-II demonstrated test-retest reliability ranging from 0.60 to 0.83 at $p < 0.0001$ (Rahim & Magner, 1995).

4.3. Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was employed to identify discriminant and convergent factors of the items in the QPCPA and ROCI-II instruments (Hair, Jr., Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). This method reduces a large number of variables into a smaller set of factors (Zikmund, 2003), using R factor analysis to identify latent dimensions. Prior to conducting factor analysis, reliability and normality tests were performed. The QPCPA scored a Cronbach Alpha of 0.780, and the ROCI-II scored 0.849, indicating acceptable reliability according to Meyers, Gamst, and Guarino (1998).

4.4. Factor Identification

To determine the number of factors, the study employed the latent root criterion, examining eigenvalues. According to Hair Jr., et al. (1998) and Meyers, et al. (2006), factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 are significant, and a satisfactory factor solution should account for at least 60% of the total variance. Factor rotation was used to achieve a clearer and more meaningful factor solution. Following factor analysis, the reliability of the identified factors was reassessed.

Table 1 shows the Cronbach Alpha values for office politics in performance appraisal after factor analysis. The first factor, renamed "Acquire Benefit," initially included nine items with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.595, which improved to 0.760 after removing Item QPCPA 22. The second factor, "Human Relation," consists of five items with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.827, reflecting superior-subordinate relationships. The third factor, "Control," includes three items with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.725. These three factors were found to reliably represent office politics in performance appraisal.

Table 1.
Reliability test computed after factor analysis.

Office politics & performance appraisal	Cronbach alpha (α)
Factor 1 [Acquire Benefit]	0.760
Factor 2 [Human Relations]	0.827
Factor 3 [Control]	0.725

Table 2 exhibits eigenvalues for Leadership Styles variable. This result indicates 3 extracted factors. These factors scored eigenvalue greater than 1.

Table 2.
Eigenvalue for managerial styles total variance explained

Component	Initial eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.302	48.202	48.202
2	1.348	12.259	60.460
3	1.184	10.759	71.220
4	0.789	7.174	78.393
5	0.622	5.656	84.049
6	0.555	5.046	89.094
7	0.384	3.490	92.584
8	0.274	2.491	95.075
9	0.256	2.325	97.400
10	0.209	1.904	99.304
11	0.077	0.696	100.000

Table 3.
Cronbach alpha computed for leadership styles.

Factor	Cronbach alpha (α) after factor analysis
Factor 1 [integrative Style]	0.899
Factor 2	0.683
Factor 3	0.651

Exhibited by table 3, factor 1 consists with 6 items of integration style including “My supervisor tries to integrate his ideas with his subordinates to come up with a decision jointly”. This factor scored .899 for Cronbach Alpha. Hence, this factor is reliable for representing managerial styles. Factor 2 encompasses 1 item integration style and 2 items obliging styles. Because of this factor scored .683 for Cronbach Alpha, therefore, this factor is not reliable for further analysis. The final factor of managerial style consists with 2 items of obliging style. Unfortunately, by referring to Cronbach Alpha value, the value for this factor was not reliable for further analysis.

5. Data Analysis

In the case-wise analysis, 18 cases were removed from the sample. The R^2 value represents the regression coefficient between the predicted and actual values of the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4, the R^2 value is 0.771, indicating that 77.10% of the variance in office politics in performance appraisal is explained by the variables human relations, control, acquire benefits, and integrative management style. Table 4 also shows that the F-value, $F(7, 69) = 29.841$, is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. This result demonstrates a significant relationship between the weighted linear combination of the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Table below exhibits coefficients table:

Table 4.
Coefficients table for office politics in performance appraisal (Control).

	Dependent variable usage (Standardized Beta)
Integrative management style	-.535*
F value = F (7,69)	29.841*
R ²	0.771

The t-test and significance levels enable researchers to evaluate the unique contribution of each variable in predicting the dependent variable. As presented in Table 4, Integrative Management Style was found to significantly predict office politics in performance appraisal. The analysis indicated that the direction of the prediction was negative, suggesting that Integrative Management Style reduces the occurrence of office politics in performance appraisal.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study extracted that only integrative leadership was performed in managing employees' performance. Meaning that, both parties superior and subordinate, will struggle to fulfill one's objective in managing performance. The superior wants the top management to look on him as a good leader if his subordinates show good results in performance appraisal. While the subordinates struggle to get a good result in performance appraisal for recognition and promotion purposes.

Referring to regression analysis results, integrative leadership style only affected control dimension of politics in performance appraisal. The effect was negative. This brings a meaning that the more integrative style being performed, the less control in politics in performance appraisal will happen. As being discussed, control dimension in politics in performance appraisal indicates that superior will use performance evaluation to motivate or to threat his subordinates in his attempt to make his department more productive and he will be looked as a good leader. Therefore, this particular leadership style is less concerns to subordinates' attitude and more concerned with what the superior needs. Thus, in performing control in performance appraisal, the superior will perform dominating rather than integrative style. This becomes the possible explanation of the negative effect of integrative style on control in politics in performance appraisal.

7. Conclusion

Realizing that in nowadays office situation, politics becomes an issue that always being talked about. Employees always talked about inequity, discrimination and leader's manipulation of power. This situation also happens in performance appraisal. Some leaders, because they want to impress top management that he has managed his department efficiently, tends to give high marks to all his subordinates. Hence, biases happen in evaluating employees' performance for instance stereotyping, halo effect, similar to me error and leniency.

This study has resulted that there were three significant forms of politics in performance appraisal. These forms are acquiring benefit, human relation and control. As been indicated, organizational politics may occur in form of positive and negative base on the leader's objective. A leader may always want to be looked good by top management even though not all his subordinates achieving the targeted performance (the leader only relies on few good performers in his department for his department achieving the desired performance) or he wants top management to evaluate his leadership base on the quality and productivity of all his subordinates. Hence, all forms of politics in performance appraisal can be seen in both forms, positive and negative.

Usually, performance appraisal is commonly used to control employees' attitude and behavior towards increasing their productivity and performance. The control factor can occur in executing politics in performance appraisal. As this factor can be used to recognize and even threat employees, it

also can be manifested in positive and negative forms. In positive form, control in politics in performance appraisal can be manifested when the superior evaluates his subordinate performance according to the real performance showed along the evaluation year. If the subordinate did not show appropriate behavior and attitude, the superior will enforce and motivate the subordinate to behave in order to achieve desired performance. A disciplinary action will be enforced if the subordinate not showing appropriate performance. In negative form of control in politics in performance appraisal, the leader will make enforcement to his department to show a good performance. In this situation, the leader only relies on subordinates who perform at their best performance and ignore the poor performer. As long as his department achieves level of productivity as indicated by top management, he will assume that he will be looked at as efficient leader by the top management. The positive form of control will increase work commitment and leader's social obligation while the negative form of control, as this form of politics in performance appraisal ignore the concept of equity will reduce job satisfaction, creative work and productivity amongst good performers.

Office politics exist when leaders manifest their power and authority by exercising political games. Even though politics in organization is needed in maintaining status quo for leaders, a bad political game in the office will create negative behavior amongst subordinates. It becomes a working culture either in private or public sector in Malaysia where subordinates will always follow instructions directed by their superior in order to portray that they are good follower which will guarantee to sustain their job. The bad political game in an office will restrict the creativity of employees and this will make them become insipid. Generally, employees always perceive that objecting to a superior's instruction will create bad relationships and construct stress between them and their superior in industrial relations.

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