Organizational Politics and Job Satisfaction: Mediation and Moderation of Political Skills

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ABSTRACT

Politics in organizations has been a concern for the job satisfaction of the employees. The minimum research on how politics are in an organization plays an essential role in job satisfaction. In this context, organizational politics are suspected of contributing to employees' job satisfaction. However, there is limited research discussing political skill as a 'bridge' variable between organizational politics and job satisfaction. The research examined the impact of moderation and mediation of political skill on organizational politics and job satisfaction in Ternate City government. It applied a quantitative method. The population was 240 employees from the middle to top management in local government offices. With purposive sampling, 86 respondents working in the Regional Government Work Unit of Ternate City were involved in the survey. The research used a hierarchical regression analysis as a statistical analysis and IBM SPSS statistics Version 24. The results show several results. First, organizational politics influences job satisfaction negatively. Second, organizational politics affect political skill positively. Third, political skill strengthens the relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction. It mediates and moderates the full relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction.

Keywords: organizational politics, job satisfaction, political skill

INTRODUCTION

Organizational politics is an activity that allows each employee in an organization to achieve the goals without going through appropriate procedures (Thornton, Esper, & Autry, 2016; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015; Utami, Bangun, & Lantu, 2014). As a general term, it indicates the relationship between power and how it influences work (Ferris, Ellen, McAllister, & Maher, 2019; Anderson & Brion, 2014). It occurs inconsistently with acceptable organizational norms. Then, it is designed to promote personal interests and is done at the expense of organizational goals (Ferris *et al.,* 2019; Kimura, 2015; Anderson & Brion, 2014; Smith *et al.,* 2014). Because of the nature of politics, the concept of organizational politics has received more attention in the management literature. The literature has considered several aspects that can be different as organizations evolve throughout time.

Then, political skill is the ability to understand others at work effectively and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways. It will enhance one's personal or organizational objectives (Kapoutsis, Papalexandris, & Thanos, 2019; Brouer, Badaway, Gallagher, & Haber, 2015; Fang, Chi, Chen, & Baron, 2015). As such, politically skilled individuals combine social astuteness with the capacity to adjust their behavior to different and changing situational demands in a manner that appears to be sincere, inspires support and trust, and effectively influences and controls the responses of others (Shaughnessy, Treadway, Breland, & Perrewé, 2017; Williams, Brandon, Hayek, Haden, & Atinc, 2017; McAllister, Ellen, Perrewé, Ferris, & Hirsch, 2015).

Job satisfaction is defined as a happy emotional state or positive emotions that come from assessing one's work or work experience (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951). Furthermore, it is also suggested that job satisfaction is a person's reaction to work or organization (Robinson, Magnusen, & Kim, 2019; Saleem, 2015; Jabid, Fahri, Buamonabot, & Arilaha, 2020; Arilaha, Fahri, Nurlela, Jabid, & Buamonabot, 2020). A satisfied employee can encourage a positive attitude by prioritizing organizational interests rather than personal ones (Heriyadi, Tjahjono, & Rahayu, 2020). Hence, it will impact the level of growth and expansion of the organization (Al-Hosam, Ahmed, Ahmad, & Joarder, 2016).

Organizational politics and political skills always occur in all organizations in various sectors, including in Indonesia. However, the practice is higher in public sector institutions (Hadi & Yulianti, 2019; Muhammad & Muhammad, 2017) than in the private ones (Herawati & Sulastri, 2019). On this basis, organizational politics research in relation to political skills and job satisfaction in the Ternate City government also needs attention. It is due to job opportunities as a highly competitive state civil service with higher job security.

One reason that considers politics and political behavior in organizations as a promising field for theoretical inquiry is the general belief that views this phenomenon as one of the existing barriers for optimal organizational performance (Saleem, 2015; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Robinson et al., 2019). The results of previous studies also show that organizational politics has a positive relationship with political skill. The individuals who have political skill always secure their position and work according to plan. In turn, it has an impact on high job satisfaction (Sun & Chen, 2017; Maslyn, Farmer, & Bettenhausen, 2017).

Power, influence, and personal interests among employees have given rise to organizational politics, which is always present in the work environment of an organization to compete for the scarcity of resources, conflicts during important decision making, and the existence of various interests among groups or individuals. It ultimately triggers the search for power, both inside and outside organizational boundaries (Faye & Long, 2014). When politics occurs within the organization, performance will decline, and employees will plan to leave (Gansen-Ammann, Meurs, Wihler, & Blickle, 2019). Situations like this have an impact on energy and thoughts about turning to other available job options (García-Chas, Neira-Fontela, Varela-Neira, & Curto-Rodríguez, 2019). It certainly causes a decrease in job satisfaction (Saleem, 2015). Employees who are not committed to the organization have a negative attitude towards work and the organization. Employees will show more dissatisfaction with work, and their trust will decrease than other employees in a more positive way. Dissatisfied employees have lower work outcomes (Yusof, Zulkiffli, Padlee, & Yusof, 2018; Faye & Long, 2014). In short, organizational politics has a negative effect on individual job satisfaction

(Cheong & Kim, 2018; Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017; Faye & Long, 2014; Yusof et al., 2018). The first proposed hypothesis (H_1) is that organizational politics influences job satisfaction negatively.

Politics is an essential variable in organizational research. It has received attention from organizational psychologists and is studied with different perspectives in organizations (Gansen-Ammann et al., 2019; Frieder & Basik, 2017). According to McAllister, Ellen, and Ferris (2018) and Lvina, Maher, and Harris (2017), managers use politics as a tool to get work done through the political environment. However, individuals involved in politics use this to achieve their interests (Bai, Dong, Liu, & Liu, 2017; García-Chas et al., 2019). Some individuals who know that the organizational environment is very political will not leave the organization because of its role as a controller in the organization. Individuals who play politics secure their positions in the organization (Buch, Thompson, & Kuvaas, 2016; Lu & Guy, 2018). Thus, the second proposed hypothesis (H_2) is that organizational politics influences political skill positively.

Meanwhile, individuals who have political skills consider themselves to be "masters" in an organization. At the same time, they secure their position (Ferris et al., 2019; Kimura, 2015). In the overall work environment, individuals predict negative and positive judgments from the environment itself. Likewise, individuals with high political skills seem to work as flexible platforms to achieve their goals (Maslyn et al., 2017). It certainly influences the evaluation of attitudes towards job satisfaction. To the extent that political skill positively affects job satisfaction, individuals who have political skill use mechanisms to achieve their goals. The third proposed hypothesis (H_3) is that political skill influences job satisfaction positively.

Moreover, according to Ferris et al. (2005), political skill is the ability to understand others effectively and use that knowledge to enhance personal or organizational goals. It can generally be used positively because people who have these skills can be trusted and are considered to be confident and easy to like, to adjust, and to overcome negative effects even when in a very high organizational political condition (Elbanna, Kapoutsis, & Mellahi, 2017; Landells & Albrecht, 2017). In many cases, employees are not only responsible for routine work activities, but managers can also use the political skill in influencing their work attitudes, including job satisfaction. Managers have an important role in the level of job satisfaction (Yusof et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2019). Hence, the fourth hypothesis (H_4) is that political skill moderates the relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction.

It can also be said that political skill plays an essential role in problem-solving in organizations that have high levels of politics. Then, it will have an impact on low job satisfaction (Faye & Long, 2014;

Yusof *et al.,* 2018). For this reason, superiors must use politics as a tool to get work done through the political environment. However, the involved individuals in politics use it to achieve their interests (Saleem, 2015). Hence, the last hypothesis (H_5) is political skill mediates the relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction.

The research examines the role of mediation and moderation of political skill in the relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction. Several studies have mentioned political skill (Jutras & Mathieu, 2016; Li & Ma, 2019; Staufenbiel & König, 2010). However, these studies have never specifically discussed political skill as a mediating variable. In terms of political skill as moderating variable, Kacmar, Andrews, Harris, and Tepper (2013) and Meisler (2014) analyzed how it acted as moderating variable. However, those researchers have tested political skill as mediating and moderating variables separately. The current research attempts to examine political skill as both variables under the same context. The research that uses political skill as a mediating variable on the relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction has never been done to the best of researchers' knowledge. This idea becomes the originality in the research. To facilitate the understanding of the relationship between various variables, the research presents a research model as shown in Figure 1.

METHODS

The research applies a quantitative method. The population in the research is 240 people, consisting of those who have middle to top management positions. By adapting the research of Roscoe, Lang, and Sheth (1975), the recommended number of prospective respondents is 30–500 people. Ternate City Government has 41 Regional Government Work Unit. One of those organizations has an office in Jakarta, so it is not examined. It represents a maximum of three respondents, so that the total of distributed questionnaires is 120. The returned questionnaires that can be used are 86 consisting of department heads, department secretaries, and division heads as the research representatives. Then, the data are analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 24.

The research uses a Likert scale with 1 as strongly disagreeing to 5 as strongly agreeing for the variables. Organizational politics is measured using 18 items developed by (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Then, job satisfaction uses 5 items developed by (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951). Moreover, political skill is measured using 18 items developed by Ferris *et al.* (2005).

Next, the research also analyzes the validity and reliability. Validity test measures what should be measured (Hair, Jr, 2015). The research uses a validity test with factor analysis, and the factor loading value is ≥ 0,5. Meanwhile, reliability is related to the accuracy and precision of a measurement procedure (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The reliability test looks at the value of Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0,7 (Jacobson & Viswesvaran, 2017). The research uses simple regression analysis for the first to the third hypothesis (Hair, Jr, 2015). However, hierarchical regression analysis is used for the fourth and fifth hypothesis (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The questionnaire distribution results show that from 120 distributed questionnaires, only 103 respondents (86%) return the questionnaires. Then, 86 questionnaires (72%) are declared eligible for analysis in the context of hypothesis testing. For the questionnaires, the used characteristics in the research include the age and length of work. In general, most respondents are male (79%) and have worked above 14 years. The research also analyzes these characteristics—age, tenure, and gender—as a part of comprehensive discussions.

The results of testing the validity in Table 1 show that only items in job satisfaction are not
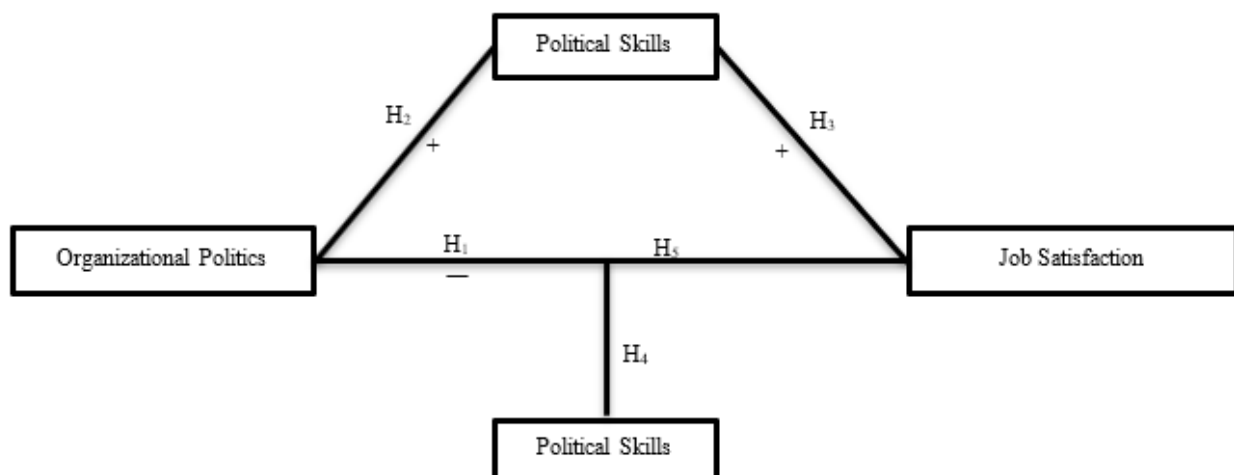

Figure 1 Research Model

discarded because those have a factor loading value, which is above 0,5. However, in organizational politics and political skill, there are discarded items. For organizational politics, from 18 items, 7 items are discarded. Meanwhile, for political skill, 5 items cannot be used. The discarded items do not meet the requirement of factor loading value. After discarding the items, the researchers consider them as valid. Furthermore, the reliability test results suggest that all items in the organizational politics, political skill, and job satisfaction have fulfilled Cronbach's alpha values above 0,7. Hence, the items are considered reliable.

Descriptive analysis of employees who work at government offices at Ternate City includes perceptions of organizational politics, political skill, and job satisfaction. The results of descriptive statistical data processing in Table 2 show that respondents conduct neutral organizational politics. For political skill, it indicates that respondents have good skills. Similar to organizational politics and political skill, job satisfaction is also perceived in good condition.

Based on Table 3, it shows that organizational politics has a significant negative effect on job satisfaction (β = -0,382, t = -2,117, and P < 0,05). Hence, H_1 is supported. For H_2, it also suggests that organizational politics has a significant positive effect on political skill (β = 0,539, t = 4,872, and P < 0,05. Thus, H_2 is supported. Similarly, H_3 is also supported. It states that political skill has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction (β = 0,346, t = 2,203, and P < 0,05). Furthermore, for H_4, the result shows that political skill moderates the relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction. It can be seen in the value of R^2, which always increases with

Table 1 The Results of Validity and Reliability Tests

Factor and Scale	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Organizational Politics with Cronbach's Alpha of 0,890			
Organizational politics 3	0,520		
Organizational politics 4	0,552		
Organizational politics 5	0,788		
Organizational politics 6	0,694		
Organizational politics 8	0,783		
Organizational politics 11	0,600		
Organizational politics 13	0,665		
Organizational politics 14	0,845		
Organizational politics 16	0,723		
Organizational politics 17	0,710		
Organizational politics 18	0,709		
Political Skill with Cronbach's Alpha of 0,871			
Political skill 3		0,584	
Political skill 4		0,520	
Political skill 6		0,665	
Political skill 7		0,740	
Political skill 8		0,602	
Political skill 9		0,618	
Political skill 11		0,711	
Political skill 12		0,724	
Political skill 14		0,639	
Political skill 15		0,548	
Political skill 16		0,791	
Political skill 17		0,532	
Political skill 18		0,615	
Job Satisfaction with Cronbach's Alpha of 0,727			
Job satisfaction 1			0,759
Job satisfaction 2			0,881
Job satisfaction 3			0,772
Job satisfaction 4			0,778
Job satisfaction 5			0,697

(Source: Processed Data)

each addition of the moderating variable (political skill) resulting from the interaction of organizational politics and job satisfaction. Finally, in Table 4 for H_5, it shows that political skill mediates the full relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction. The direct influence of the organization on job satisfaction is -0,346. With mediation, it produces a value of 0,086 (total effect). Therefore, political skill can fully mediate the relationship between organizational job satisfaction. H_4 and H_5 are supported.

The research eagerly does not only discuss how the hypotheses are proven or otherwise. The discussion also includes the succinct elaboration of the analysis of statistic descriptive. In particular, this discussion focuses on gender and the tenure period of the respondents. It is interesting to note the respondents' gender in the research. Almost 80% of the respondents are male. This gender has more advantageous positions in organizational politics than its counterpart. Previous researchers have shown this tendency (Mann, 1995; Perrewé & Nelson, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot & Meisler, 2010). These studies also verify the next findings regarding the direct influence of organizational skills on job satisfaction or the indirect effect of organizational skills on job satisfaction, moderated by political skill.

In terms of the tenure period, the descriptive analysis shows that most of the respondents have been working for more than 14 years. This period is quite astonishing because of the nature of the job and job opportunity. However, they can have one explanation. The respondents are public servants who have higher job security. Compared to those who work in the private sector, public servants need powerful evidence of misconduct from their job description, leading them to have severe punishments. The most common result of the misconduct leads to corruption, and the procedure to fire those employees take a higher level of action up to the ministry. This situation is likely to be different in the private sector, where the decision can be made with each company's very simple procedure. Besides, in Ternate City, job opportunities are highly competitive, and for career development, jobs with higher job security are preferred.

Table 2 The Employee Perception on Organizational Politics, Political skill, and Job Satisfaction

Variable	(%) Strongly Disagree	(%) Disagree	(%) Neutral	(%) Agree	(%) Strongly Agree	Modus
Organizational politics	8,77	31,92	32,88	21,67	4,76	Neutral
Political skill	2,50	8,41	20,57	55,01	13,51	Agree
Job satisfaction	5,37	16,59	19,63	45,33	13,08	Agree

(Source: Processed Data)

Table 3 Hypothesis Test Results

Independent Variable	Job Satisfaction					Political Skill				
	β	T	Sig.	R²	SE	β	T	Sig.	R²	SE
Organizational politics	-0,382	-2,117	0,037	0,039	0,181	0,539	4,872	0,000	0,211	0,111
Political skill	0,346	2,203	0,030	0,050	0,157	-	-	-	-	-
Political skill (mediation)	0,644	3,910	0,000	0,179	0,165	-	-	-	-	-
Organizational politics * Political skill	0,563	2,236	0,028	0,217	0,252	-	-	-	-	-

Note: β (beta), T (T-Count), Sig. (Significant), R² (R-Squared), SE (Standard Error), and P (Probability)
(Source: Processed Data)

Table 4 Direct, Indirect, and Total Effect for Political Skill as Mediating Variable

Variable	Direct	Indirect	Total Effect
Organizational politics – Political skill	0,539	0,432	0,086
Political skill – Job satisfaction	0,346	-	-
Organizational politics – Job satisfaction	-0,346	-	-

(Source: Processed Data)

Organizational politics that can lead to job satisfaction have certain tendencies on tenure. The length of tenure indicates the level of employees' satisfaction within an organization. During their tenure, the employees have had a certain level of political skill that enables them to stay longer in the organization. In other words, organizational politics strengthened by political skill enables employees to stay longer and provide an environment that satisfies them (Brouer, Harris, & Kacmar, 2011; Vigoda-Gadot & Meisler, 2010)

The results show that organizational politics has a significant negative effect on job satisfaction. Meanwhile, organizational politics has a significant positive impact on the political skill, and political skill positively affects job satisfaction. Organizational politics in organizations seeks to fight over the scarcity of resources, conflicts during important decision making, and the existence of various interests among groups or individuals, which ultimately triggers the search for power in the inside and outside organizational boundaries. It will certainly decrease job satisfaction (Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Faye & Long, 2014). The results are also consistent with Ferris *et al.* (2019). The managers use politics as a tool to get work done through the political environment. However, involved individuals in politics also use it to achieve self-interest (Kapoutsis *et al.,* 2019). It means that high organizational politics will be followed by political skills (Fang *et al.,* 2015).

Next, the results are also in line with the theory of Kimura (2015). Individuals who have political skills consider themselves to be "masters" in an organization, while at the same time, they also secure their position. In the overall work environment, individuals predict negative and positive judgments from the environment itself. Likewise, individuals with high political skills seem to work flexibly to achieve their goals and certainly influence the evaluation of attitudes towards job satisfaction (Maslyn *et al.,* 2017; Landells & Albrecht, 2017). To the extent that political skill positively affects job satisfaction, individuals who have political skill use mechanisms to achieve their goals. Tests related to moderation and mediation also show that political skill moderates and mediates variables in the research. The results are also supported by the research of Cheong and Kim (2018) and Yusof *et al.* (2018).

CONCLUSIONS

The research emphasizes three main contributions as well as the implication. First, the research discusses new findings, namely political skill as a mediator in the relationship between organizational politics and job satisfaction. The results also confirm the previous research. Second, in terms of gender difference, the research provides evidence that men dominate in organizational politics compared to their counterparts. This result aligns with previous studies even though with the different context of the organization. Finally, early descriptive analysis has shown a tendency of this aspect on job satisfaction regarding the length of tenure. The longer the tenure is, the more satisfied the employees are. It also affirms previous studies that provide similar evidence.

Moreover, the research has several limitations. First, there is a possibility of common method bias that the respondents do self-reporting. The respondents answer the questions based on their subjective judgments which can have a perceptual bias. Second, the research has a limited sample size due to the limited number of heads of the office and secretaries. Hence, the research can only generalize the results from all government institutions.

The results show that political skill is a full mediating variable. In addition, the proposed hypothesis in the research is consistent with the results of previous studies. Future research should test leadership style as a mediator to see each individual's personality and the impact on turnover intention caused by low job satisfaction.

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