

No One Can Serve Two Masters: A Contradictory Opinion in Case of Organizational Politics and Ethics

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Abstract

Organizational politics is seen as a process through which one tries to fulfill their goals without considering the well-being of others. The ways adopted for fulfillment of goals might be sanctioned or unsanctioned (Mintzberg, 1985). Ethics works as a foundation for the Organisation as it provides employees with a shared value system around which the intra organizational and inter organisation communication takes place. The aim of this research paper is to find out whether politics and ethics survives subsist together in an organization or not. An empirical study has been conducted to attain our objective. The study was conducted in Academic organisations. The idea behind selecting Academic organisation is that these institutions are considered as idle organizations where one learns morals, values and discipline. The outcome of this study shows that ethics and politics can be present together in an organisation.

1. Introduction

Organizations are group of people intentionally organized to achieve predefined common goals. An organization consists of individuals and units with different values and interests. Difference in opinions of different individuals or units setups the foundation for political activities in an Organization. Charles Darwin's theory of "Survival of the fittest" on the Origin of the Species fits well in organizational scenario as all individuals showcase their best in an organization and based on it their success or defeat depends. In this competitive era individuals have to keep on trying to reach their desired objectives, they compete with each other to succeed in their respective areas. This turf war between individuals to succeed creates a political environment within the organization.

This piece of work tries to deal with two different concepts within an Organization. One concept delineates politics within the Organization. During the past few decades concept of Organizational Politics has received increased attention in management literature. Hundreds of studies

related to Politics at workplace are present which helps in increasing the knowledge about its different dimensions. It is now accepted that Politics is present in every organization and is involved in every facet of organizational life. In presence of politics it becomes necessary to check whether ethical norms are given value by the employees in organization or not. Hence, Organizational ethics is taken into account in this paper. Organizational ethics consists of inculcating ethical behavior in organizations. Inculcating ethical behavior includes evaluating once morals and values according to the Organization's norms and finding the best possible honorable behavior to adapt. While organizational ethics can apply broadly to a variety of organizational contexts, our analysis remains focused on its application in academic institutions. The question of ethicality arises when one adopts unofficial ways for his or her organizational benefit. Here the need arises to check whether ethics and politics can sustain in an organization simultaneously or not. This research paper is based on a study conducted in higher academic institutions in India as Academic institutions are also not untouched from this. Empirical test of presence of ethics and politics

was executed.

2. What and How of Organizational Politics

The inception of formal discussion about organizational politics took back in 1970's. (Drory & Romm, 1988). Politics is defined as “individual or group behavior that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimate – sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise”. (Mintzberg, 1985).

Mintzberg (1985) has made it clear in his work that before 1980's only frail attempts were taken to uncover Politics. Politics in Organizations was like that unseen elephant whose presence was felt but no one dared to label it. Pericles wrote over 2500 years ago, “Just because you do not take interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take interest in you”. Politics is a reality and one must not ignore it. One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics may be that you end up being governed by your inferiors.

Organizational politics opened new prospects of

understanding behavior in organizations, thence it became a fruitful field for researchers. Different approaches to understand politics in organizations are carefully weighed (Vigoda, 2003). Primitive studies in this field set up Organizational politics as a negative aspect for organizations. Overall, political behaviour was viewed as bad, unfair, unnecessary and conflict-oriented (Nazalan et al., 2012). Later researcher's attention was channeled towards employees' subjective perceptions of organizational politics rather than on political behavior or influence tactics. (Parker et al., 1995). Academicians also came forth with “Political skill” as a concept. It is believed that political skill is one of the interpersonal effectiveness construct which merges social understanding with the ability to adjust behavior according to the situation and it appears sincere, inspires trust and support, and effectively influence others (Ferris et al., 2005, 2007). Those who possess this competency are able to attain their organizational as well as individual goals. In scholarly literature four key dimensions of Political skill inventory (PSI) have been developed. The desired behaviors are: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005). These dimensions are tabulated below (Table: 1)

Table 1: Political skills

Political skill dimensions	Description
Social Astuteness	Precisely observe others, understands social interactions, and sensitivity towards others.
Interpersonal influence	Adapting and calibrating their behavior to elicit particular responses, Subtle and convincing personal style.
Networking ability	Easily develop friendships and build strong beneficial alliances, highly skilled negotiators and deal makers.
Apparent sincerity	Appear to others as person with high levels of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, genuineness.

(Source: Derived from work by Ferris et al., 2005 Development and Validation of the political skill inventory. *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31 No. 1, February 2005 pp 126-152.)

3. Ethics in Organizational Setting

Recent Scandals in different Organizations throughout the Globe has made ethics an area of significant interest for those who study and

theorize behavior in Organisations. Ethics works as a foundation for the Organisation as it provides employees with a shared value system around which the intra organizational and inter organisation communication takes place. Lack of

ethics may act as a threat for progress as well as sustainability of the organization. Fundamentally, Ethics is a branch of philosophy which deals with analyzing right and wrong of human behavior or conduct. It also contains the prohibitory actions at the workplace (Collier- Esteban 2007; Duska, 1999).

Generally, Organisations have a codified list of conducts and ethics committee which works for the pursuit of resolving ethical dilemmas in an organisation. Despite of these efforts by Organisation one often gets to hear members of different organisations complaining about unethical decisions being made in their respective organisations. Narrowing our vision in this area we get to see that the hurdle lies in the practical implementation of the code of conducts in an organisation.

Most of the work in the arena of normative ethics has germinated from three different moral theories namely, Utilitarian theories assesses behavior in terms of its social consequences, theory of rights stresses on entitlements of individuals and theory of justice focuses on distributional effects of actions (Cavanagh et al., 1981). While it seems that everyone around know the real meaning of ethics, defining ethics has long been baffling for both practitioners and researchers (Brenner and Molander, 1977). It is seen that different individuals interpret human conduct differently and position them as ethical or unethical.

It has been observed that regardless of organisations efforts to induce basic ethical values amongst its employees, organisations fail to do so. One probable reason behind this is that every individual come from a different social background and in their life stage they meet different people which impacts their thinking process. Henceforth individuals have different perspectives of ethics.

In such a condition it becomes important to see how ethics survive in organisation in which individual often face politics.

4. How Ethical is being Political

It has been mentioned in the literature above that Politics sustains in every organisation and ethics is a part of an individual. Employees in an organisation are most useful resource of an organization. It becomes interesting to see whether ethical activities and political activities survive in the same cesspool. This research work is conducted in order to dig further in this area. Here an attempt has been made to find out whether individuals proficient with political skills are concerned with ethical issues within an organisation or not. For this certain hypotheses have been formulated:

- H_0 : There is no relationship between Social astuteness and ethical behavior
- H_{01} : There is no relationship between Interpersonal influence and ethical behavior
- H_{02} : There is no relationship between Networking ability and ethical behavior
- H_{03} : There is no relationship between Apparent sincerity and ethical behavior.
- H_{04} : Political activities and ethical activities cannot co-exist in an organization.

5. Research Methodology

5a) Sample & Measure for the study:

The sample of the study consists of Faculty members of Higher Academic Institutes across India. The study was conducted by mailing them a questionnaire through emails. Questionnaires are an efficient tool for collecting information on facts and opinions from a large group of people (Riley, et al., 2000). A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed amongst them and 170 respondents completed the questionnaire. The response rate was 56.66 percent. The research instrument comprised of two sections. First section consisted of different demographic questions like their age group, annual income, years of experience etc. Second section of the questionnaire consisted of questions dealing with political skills and ethical behavior. The instrument formulated to measure

Political skill and ethical behavior was based on a Five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

6. Results

6a) Demographic Profile

This questionnaire was returned fully filled by 170 respondents. Among which 68.2% were Males and 31.8% were Females. 48.22% respondents consisted of Assistant professors, 23.66% were Associate professors and 28.12% were Professors. Age group of respondents also varied, 45.66% were in 21-30 age group, 38.22%

in 31-40, 51-60% in 9.01% and 61 and above in 7.11% age group.

6b) Reliability and validity assessment

Reliability of an instrument refers to the extent to which a scale produces consistent results (Malhotra, N. K., 2007). Cronbach's alpha (α) is a statistical tool which is used to measure reliability of an instrument. Cronbach's alpha value might fall between 0.0 to 1.0; it depicts the degree to which items of an instrument are correlated with each other (Connelly, 2011). An alpha value more than .070 (Hair et al., 1998) is an indicator of good internal consistency.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.812	32

Total cases: 170

The validity of the scales used in the questionnaire was measured through face and content validity. Face validity of an instrument is measured by the judgment of the researcher (Malhotra, N. K. & Birks, D. F., 2007) as researcher have deep knowledge about the subject. Content validity of an instrument was measured by specifying what was intended to measure (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Literature survey also helped in identifying all possible items which is necessary to include in the scale.

6c) Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis was carried out to draw inferences from the data. Mean and standard deviation were computed. Mean is the average score of each item which shows how maximum number of respondents responded to each item. Standard deviation was carried out to find out how the responses vary around the mean of the item. More deviation means more difference in opinion and less opinion means less difference in opinion. Mean scores show whether responses fall on satisfaction side or dissatisfaction side.

Table 3: Descriptive result statistics of the variables

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Support by coworkers in following code of conduct	170	4.45	.586
Agree "Right is Right", even if everyone is against it	170	4.48	.756
Feel alienated when i discover that people have betrayed me	170	4.07	.863
Never lie, even if beneficial	170	4.10	.783
Duty to report any unethical activity by colleagues	170	4.25	.738
Rewards and Promotions are directly linked to performance	170	4.06	.922
Treat colleagues with respect	170	4.51	.506
Act accordingly ethical as i say	170	4.20	.786
Allocation of resources is fair	170	3.49	1.081

Good ethical decisions even if not profitable	170	4.18	.806
Stand by higher authorities because they live up to their commitments	170	3.84	1.065
Affirm that behavior inside organization is ethical	170	4.15	.743
Time and effort at work networking with others	170	3.36	1.385
Communicate easily and effectively	170	4.38	.684
Build good rapport with most people	170	4.08	.732
Able to make people comfortable and at ease	170	4.19	1.052
Understand people very well	170	3.59	.957
Good at building relationships with influential people	170	3.54	1.218
Show that seriously interested in others work	170	3.39	1.094
Good at sensing hidden agendas	170	3.38	1.267
Try to be genuine while communicating	170	4.12	.841
Network of colleagues whom can be call for support	170	3.41	1.251
Connected with important people	170	3.22	1.309
Communicating and making connections at work is waste of time	170	3.15	1.312
Difficult to make people like yourselves	170	3.26	1.213
Others belief	170	3.19	1.285
Genuine interest in others work	170	3.63	.956
Good at using my connection and network to make things happen	170	3.31	1.312
Savvy about how to present oneself	170	3.62	1.138
Know the right things to say and do to influence others	170	3.35	1.089
Pay close attention to facial expressions	170	3.75	.994
Understanding people and their motives is tough task	170	3.62	1.149

6d) Testing of Hypotheses

1. H₀: No relationship between Social astuteness and ethical behavior will be found among respondents of the study. Test value =3

Table 4: Test of hypothesis (H₀)

	t	Df	Mean Difference
Affirm that behavior inside organization is ethical	10.570	169	1.177
Stand by higher authorities because they live up to their commitments	5.309	169	.834
Good ethical decisions even if not profitable	9.814	169	1.188
Allocation of resources is fair	3.176	169	.510
Act accordingly ethical as i say	10.239	169	1.201
Treat colleagues with respect	20.152	169	1.411
Rewards and Promotions are directly linked to performance	7.797	169	1.089
Duty to report any unethical activity by colleagues	11.253	169	1.322

Never lie, even if beneficial	9.068	169	1.167
Feel alienated when i discover that people have betrayed me	8.388	169	1.167
Agree "Right is Right", even if everyone is against it	13.196	169	1.499
Support by coworkers in following code of conduct	16.452	169	1.522
Understand people very well	4.336	169	.632
Show that seriously interested in others work	2.328	169	.388
Good at sensing hidden agendas	2.002	169	.379
Savvy about how to present oneself	3.542	169	.600
Know the right things to say and do to influence others	2.177	169	.366
Pay close attention to facial expressions	5.231	169	.777
Understanding people and their motives is tough task	3.755	169	.644

At 5% level of significance

All calculated value is more than the table value: 1.645, therefore Null hypothesis is rejected. Relationship is found between social astuteness and ethical behavior.

1. Ho: There is no relationship between interpersonal influence and ethical behavior among respondents of the study. Test value =3

Table 5: Test of hypothesis (H1)

	t	Df	Mean Difference
Support by coworkers in following code of conduct	16.452	169	1.522
Agree "Right is Right", even if everyone is against it	13.196	169	1.499
Feel alienated when i discover that people have betrayed me	8.388	169	1.167
Never lie, even if beneficial	9.068	169	1.167
Duty to report any unethical activity by colleagues	11.253	169	1.322
Rewards and Promotions are directly linked to performance	7.797	169	1.189
Treat colleagues with respect	20.152	169	1.411
Act accordingly ethical as i say	10.239	169	1.201
Allocation of resources is fair	3.176	169	.510
Good ethical decisions even if not profitable	9.814	169	1.188
Stand by higher authorities because they live up to their commitments	5.309	169	.834
Affirm that behavior inside organization is ethical	10.570	169	1.177
Communicate easily and effectively	13.516	169	1.377
Build good rapport with most people	9.963	169	1.090
Able to make people comfortable and at ease	7.520	169	1.179
Difficult to make people like yourselves	1.734	169	.277

At 5% level of significance

All calculated value is more than 1.645, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. Relationship is found between interpersonal influence and ethical behavior.

1. Ho: There is no relationship between Networking ability and ethical behavior among respondents of the study.
Test Value = 3

Table 6: Test of hypothesis (H2)

	t	Df	Mean Difference
Support by coworkers in following code of conduct	16.452	169	1.522
Agree "Right is Right", even if everyone is against it	13.196	169	1.499
Feel alienated when i discover that people have betrayed me	8.388	169	1.167
Never lie, even if beneficial	9.068	169	1.167
Duty to report any unethical activity by colleagues	11.253	169	1.322
Rewards and Promotions are directly linked to performance	7.797	169	1.89
Treat colleagues with ,respect	20.152	169	1.411
Act accordingly ethical as i say	10.239	169	1.201
Allocation of resources is fair	3.176	169	.510
Good ethical decisions even if not profitable	9.814	169	1.188
Stand by higher authorities because they live up to their commitments	5.309	169	.834
Affirm that behavior inside organization is ethical	10.570	169	1.177
Time and effort at work networking with others	1.755	169	.343
Good at building relationships with influential people	2.940	169	.532
Network of colleagues whom can be call for support	2.259	169	.419
Connected with important people	2.021	169	.401
Communicating and making connections at work is waste of time	1.794	169	.456
Good at using my connection and network to make things happen	1.702	169	.332

At 5% level of significance

All calculated value is more than 1.645, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. Relationship is found between networking ability and ethical behavior.

1. Ho: There is no relationship between apparent Sincerity and ethical behavior among respondents of the study. Test value=3

Table 7: Test of hypothesis (H3)

Variables	t	Df	Mean Difference
Support by coworkers in following code of conduct	16.452	169	1.522
Agree "Right is Right", even if everyone is against it	13.196	169	1.499
Feel alienated when i discover that people have betrayed me	8.388	169	1.167
Never lie, even if beneficial	9.068	169	1.167

Duty to report any unethical activity by colleagues	11.253	169	1.322
Rewards and Promotions are directly linked to performance	7.797	169	1.189
Treat colleagues with respect	20.152	169	1.411
Act accordingly ethical as i say	10.239	169	1.201
Allocation of resources is fair	3.176	169	.510
Good ethical decisions even if not profitable	9.814	169	1.188
Stand by higher authorities because they live up to their commitments	5.309	169	.834
Affirm that behavior inside organization is ethical	10.570	169	1.177
Try to be genuine while communicating	9.030	169	1.131
Others belief	1.930	169	.176
Genuine interest in others work	4.527	169	.654

At 5% level of significance

All calculated value is more than 1.645, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. Relationship is found between apparent sincerity and ethical behavior.

1. H_{04} : Political activities and ethical activities cannot co-exist in an organization.

Test value = 3

	t	Df	Mean Difference
Support by coworkers in following code of conduct	16.452	169	1.522
Agree "Right is Right", even if everyone is against it	13.196	169	1.499
Feel alienated when i discover that people have betrayed me	8.388	169	1.167
Never lie, even if beneficial	9.068	169	1.167
Duty to report any unethical activity by colleagues	11.253	169	1.322
Rewards and Promotions are directly linked to performance	7.797	169	1.189
Treat colleagues with respect	20.152	169	1.411
Act accordingly ethical as i say	10.239	169	1.201
Allocation of resources is fair	3.176	169	.510
Good ethical decisions even if not profitable	9.814	169	1.188
Stand by higher authorities because they live up to their commitments	5.309	169	.834
Affirm that behavior inside organization is ethical	10.570	169	1.177
Time and effort at work networking with others	1.758	169	.343
Communicate easily and effectively	13.515	169	1.377
Build good rapport with most people	9.963	169	1.090
Able to make people comfortable and at ease	7.520	169	1.179
Understand people very well	4.336	169	.632
Good at building relationships with influential people	2.940	169	.532
Show that seriously interested in others work	2.328	169	.388

Good at sensing hidden agendas	2.002	169	.379
Try to be genuine while communicating	9.030	169	1.131
Network of colleagues whom can be call for support	2.259	169	.419
Connected with important people	2.021	169	.401
Communicating and making connections at work is waste of time	1.794	169	.456
Difficult to make people like yourselves	1.734	169	.277
Others belief	1.930	169	.176
Genuine interest in others work	4.527	169	.654
Good at using my connection and network to make things happen	1.702	169	.332
Savvy about how to present oneself	3.542	169	.600
Know the right things to say and do to influence others	2.177	169	.366
Pay close attention to facial expressions	5.232	169	.777
Understanding people and their motives is tough task	3.755	169	.644

At 5% level of significance

All calculated value is more than 1.645, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. It was found that political activities and ethical activities co-exist.

Conclusion

This study tested different hypotheses in which t-values of different variables were tested and it was found that calculated value is more than 1.645, therefore null hypothesis is rejected.

Results of this study suggest that some relationship exists between different political skills and ethical behaviour. This shows that being politically skilled is nowhere related to not being ethical. In support of it, this also shows that political activities and ethical activities coexist in an organisation. This piece of work helps all researchers or Organizational theorists in setting out with this basic idea that Ethical practices can be followed by those workers who are politically active in organisations.

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