Organizational political climate: Shared perceptions about the building and use of power bases

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ABSTRACT

Organizational politics continues to be acknowledged as a real and important dimension of organizational functioning. Most research has focused on 'perceptions of organizational politics' where organizational politics is conceptualized negatively and its relationship with detrimental individual and organizational outcomes is demonstrated. We argue that organizational politics can be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional climate level construct and that 'organizational political climate' can be both functional and dysfunctional. We propose and explain a four dimensional model of organizational political climate informed by existing theoretical perspectives on power bases. The four key dimensions are represented by the building and use of personal power, positional power, connection power and informational power. We also highlight the need for a comprehensive measure of organizational political climate which is underpinned by the four dimensions and which enables an assessment of the extent to which the organizational political climate is functional and/or dysfunctional. In summary, we recommend that HR practitioners seek to understand the functional and dysfunctional dimensions of organizational political climate and implement practices to foster a positive political climate. We overview practical implications for HR managers and suggest a future research agenda.

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1. Introduction

In their extensive review of thirty years of organizational politics research, Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, and Ammeter (2002) concluded that the majority of research regarding perceptions of organizational politics had been negatively biased with the early negatively framed definitions and measures shaping subsequent research. As an example, organizational politics has been defined with reference to "activities that are self-serving, illegitimate, and often harmful to the organization or its members" (Rosen, Chang, Johnson, & Levy, 2009, p. 203). Such activities include back-stabbing, self-promotion and ingratiation (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Gandz & Murray, 1980; Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewé, & Johnson, 2003).

The negative conceptualizations of organizational politics have been reinforced by researchers' widespread use of the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS; Ferris & Kacmar, 1989, 1992; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) as a measure of organizational politics and the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Model (POPM; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996, 2002; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997) as an organizing framework. The POPS has been described as "the de facto standard of measurement for political perceptions" (Miller, Byrne, Rutherford, & Hansen, 2009, p. 282) and the POPM as the most widely-referenced framework for understanding perceptions of politics (Chang et al., 2009). Although the reliability of the POPS has been consistently demonstrated (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Harris & Kacmar, 2003; Kiewitz, Restubog, Zagenczyk, & Hochwarter, 2009; Miller et al., 2009), it focuses on negative practices and behaviors (Dipboye

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& Foster, 2002; Fedor & Maslyn, 2002). Items which illustrate the negative bias include "People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down", and "Telling others what they want to hear is sometimes better than telling the truth".

Extensive research utilizing the POPS has demonstrated the detrimental effects of perceived politics on individual, team and organizational outcomes. A meta-analysis by Miller, Rutherford, and Kolodinsky (2008), integrating the results of 59 studies conducted across more than 20 years, noted strong relationships between organizational politics and job satisfaction ($\rho = -0.45$), job stress ($\rho = 0.45$), turnover intentions ($\rho = 0.44$), and organizational commitment ($\rho = -0.41$). Similarly, Chang et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis of 70 studies demonstrated detrimental associations between perceptions of organizational politics and outcomes such as strain ($\rho = 0.48$), turnover intentions ($\rho = 0.43$), job satisfaction ($\rho = -0.57$), and affective commitment ($\rho = -0.54$).

In summary, extensive research has demonstrated detrimental organizational outcomes associated with organizational politics as measured by the POPS. This body of research poses challenges for HR practitioners given that organizational politics is widely recognized to be highly pervasive (Chang et al., 2009; Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010) and increasingly recognized as a fact of organizational experience (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011). Based on these findings, it is clear that "HRD professionals cannot afford to ignore organizational politics and view it as irrelevant" (Yang, 2003, p. 474).

Despite extensive empirical research on organizational politics, there remains a lack of consensus regarding the definition of the construct (Drory & Romm, 1990; Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011; Provis, 2006). Drory and Vigoda-Gadot (2010) recently observed that "the wide variety of definitions of organizational politics suggests that the concept is in transition and under continuous debate" (p. 195).

The present paper offers an extension and a consolidation of current conceptualizations of organizational politics. Drawing from the organizational politics, power and climate literatures we propose a model showing how organizational politics can, at least in part, be framed at the level of organizational climate. We define 'organizational political climate' as shared perceptions about the building and use of power in practices and workarounds regarding policies and procedures to influence decision-making, resource allocation and the achievement of individual, team and organizational goals. Four power bases (positional, personal, informational and connection) inform our definition and our model of organizational political climate. We further propose that the organizational political climate can be both functional and dysfunctional. As described below, we suggest HR practitioners can use the model to gain insight into their organizational political climate and to implement practices aimed at fostering a functional and positive political climate.

2. Organizational political climate

2.1. Organizational politics and organizational political climate

Empirical research regarding organizational politics has focused on varying levels of analysis. As previously noted, to date, the major focus has been on broad 'perceptions of organizational politics' (e.g., Ferris & Kacmar, 1989, 1992; Ferris et al., 2002). However, researchers have also focused on political behavior (e.g., Cohen & Vigoda, 1999; Farrell & Petersen, 1982), political tactics (e.g., Allen et al., 1979; Zanzi, Arthur, & Shamir, 1991; Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001), and, more recently, political skill (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005; Perrewé & Nelson, 2004; Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005). Perceptions of organizational politics have also been assessed at varying levels including the individual (e.g., Brouer, Ferris, Hochwarter, Laird, & Gilmore, 2006) and the team (e.g., Treadway, Adams, & Goodman, 2005). The range of research foci has prompted consideration of levels of analysis issues within organizational politics research (Dipboye & Foster, 2002). Overall, there are opportunities to more clearly understand organizational politics, to specify its dimensions and to identify how it impacts at varying levels of analyses. As previously noted, the present paper focuses on organizational politics with organizational climate as the level of analysis.

Although a number of researchers have noted a relationship between perceptions of politics and organizational climate (Dipboye & Foster, 2002; Ferris et al., 2002; Liu, Liu, & Wu, 2010; O'Connor & Morrison, 2001), the research streams on politics and climate have "proceeded in a largely independent manner" (Kiewitz et al., 2009). Others have positioned 'perceptions of organizational politics' as a dimension of organizational climate (Dipboye & Foster, 2002; Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995). Dipboye and Foster noted that collective or aggregated perceptions of politics are "essentially dimensions of climate at the group or organizational level" (p. 265). Parker, Dipboye and Jackson identified a politics factor as one of 15 factors in their organizational climate measure. Their six-item factor included items such as 'The real world within the organization is one of undercutting and behind the scenes politics'.

A limited number of researchers have explicitly recognized the notion of an organizational political climate, arguing in support of a stand-alone political climate (e.g., Drory, 1993; Treadway, Adams, et al., 2005), paralleling conceptualizations of functionally specific 'climates for something' (Schneider, 1975) such as 'service climate' (Schneider, 1980) and 'safety climate' (Zohar, 1980). Treadway, Adams, et al. (2005), for example, argued in support of 'political sub-climates' on the basis of their finding varying perceptions of organizational politics in different departments within a retail organization.

Building on arguments proposed by Treadway, Adams, et al. (2005) and Drory (1993), we propose that perceptions of organizational politics can sensibly be measured at the level of organizational climate. Just as organizational climate is said to consist of 'shared perceptions' about organizational policies, practices and procedures (Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Schneider, Gunnarson, & Niles-Jolly, 1994), organizational political climate might similarly be seen to consist of 'shared perceptions' of practices, policies and procedures specific to organizational politics.

Organizational practices, as opposed to organizational policies and procedures, provide the clearest insights into an organizational political climate. Organizational political climates are framed around perceptions of how people, in practice, *work*

with and *work around* the policies and procedures associated with organizational recruitment, organizational decision-making, achievement of goals, allocation of resources, and reward allocation. 'Workarounds', defined as "a method for accomplishing a task or goal when the normal process or method isn't producing the desired results" (Bishop, 2012, p. 2), are particularly relevant in the context of organizational politics. With respect to decision-making, for example, it might be widely regarded that people often work around formal procedures by seeking assistance from influential people they know. Or it might be widely recognized that people exploit loopholes in selection policies to advantage preferred job applicants. More broadly, there may be shared perceptions that common practices 'around here' include use of networks to access potentially useful information; people getting ahead based on who they know; and people investing considerable time and energy trying to understand who can influence decisions. Each of these practices can be perceived positively or negatively and can contribute to what is perceived as a functional or dysfunctional organizational political climate. For example, employees could be perceived to exploit a policy loophole in a positive way to make a process more efficient or in a negative way to benefit themselves at the expense of others.

Although practices, policies and procedures all provide insight into perceptions of organizational politics, it is the 'sharedness' of perceptions which is a defining feature of organizational climate and which distinguishes organizational climate from psychological climate (Parker et al., 2003). Therefore, careful attention must be directed toward the level of agreement at which perceptions are deemed to be shared and at which the climate can be said to exist (Joyce & Slocum, 1984). Careful consideration must also be given to the strength of the organizational political climate (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). In addition, researchers must be cognizant of the possibility of political sub-climates (Treadway, Adams, et al., 2005).

In summary, organizational political climate can be defined in terms of the shared perceptions of practices such as workarounds and working with policies and procedures, particularly those associated with organizational recruitment, organizational decision-making, achievement of goals, and the allocation of resources and rewards.

2.2. Dimensions of organizational political climate

Organizational climate, as a broad construct, has been defined and conceptualized in a range of ways (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011) and its dimensionality remains a source of debate (Patterson et al., 2005). Similarly, there has been disagreement regarding the definition and dimensionality of perceptions of organizational politics (Fedor, Ferris, Harrell-Cook, & Russ, 1998; Nye & Witt, 1993). Dipboye and Foster (2002), for example, noted that perceptions of politics has variously been treated as a unidimensional construct (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Nye & Witt, 1993; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999) and as a multi-dimensional scale consisting of three factors (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997) or five factors (Fedor et al., 1998). Very little theory has been invoked to inform the alternative or competing conceptualizations.

For the present purposes we draw from the extensive literature on power bases (Atwater & Yammarino, 1996; French & Raven, 1959; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979; Pfeffer, 1992a, 1992b; Raven, 1965, 1993, 2008; Raven, Schwarzwald, & Koslowsky, 1998; Yukl & Falbe, 1991) to provide insight into the definition and dimensionality of organizational political climate. Although an association between power and politics has long been recognized by researchers (Block, 1987; Buchanan & Badham, 1999, 2008; Drory, 1993; Drory & Romm, 1988; Kurchner-Hawkins & Miller, 2006; Lewis, 2002; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992a, 1992b; Provis, 2006) the specifics and levels of analysis of such links have not been clearly or consistently drawn.

Building on our definition of organizational political climate as previously described, we argue that power bases can be applied to the conceptualization and measurement of organizational political climate. Organizational political climate will consist of shared perceptions that people *build* and *use* power bases in practices and workarounds regarding policies and procedures to influence organizational decision-making, resource allocation and achievement of goals. As depicted in Fig. 1, four key power
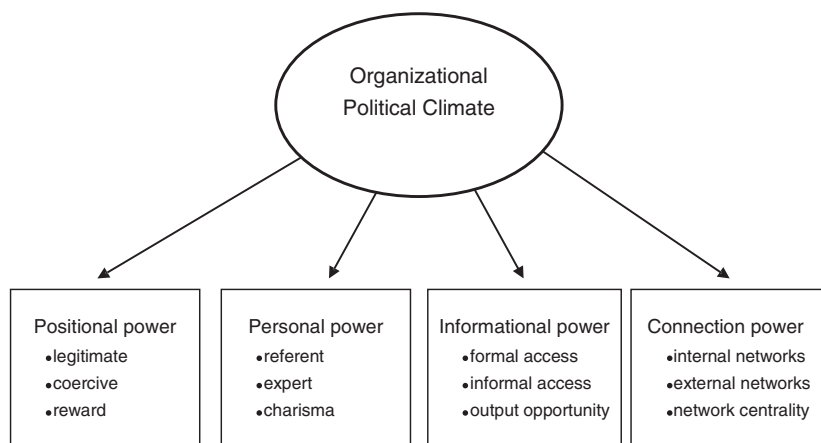

Fig. 1. Dimensions of organizational political climate.

bases define important dimensions of, and provide a comprehensive account of, organizational political climate. These bases accommodate positive, neutral and negative accounts of organizational politics.

The four power bases depicted in Fig. 1 are positional power, personal power, informational power and connection power. These four bases derive from earlier and widely recognized conceptualizations of power bases (Bass, 1960; French & Raven, 1959; Hersey et al., 1979). French and Raven, for example, described five power bases: coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, referent power and expert power. Bass (1960) sub-classified these power bases as personal power bases or positional power bases. Consistent with arguments posed by Bass, the broader groupings of 'positional' and 'personal' power bases are modeled in Fig. 1 where 'positional power' incorporates legitimate power, coercive power and reward power and 'personal power' incorporates referent power, expert power and charisma. The personal power bases are attributed to the individual, and the positional power bases are attributed to the individual's position. Raven (1965) extended French and Raven's (1959) five power bases to six by adding informational power. Hersey et al. (1979) later added a seventh power base of connection. In the proposed model the two additional dimensions are positioned alongside personal and positional powers rather than as a subset of personal or positional power. This positioning of informational power and connection power acknowledges that these two power bases cannot exclusively be assigned or attributed to the person or the position. Greiner and Schein (1988) also identified 'others' support', which includes the ability to call on connections and networks, as a distinct power base. We argue that the four power bases, as shown in Fig. 1, provide an encompassing yet parsimonious and practical account of organizational political climate.

As argued earlier, organizational political climate can be defined in terms of shared perceptions about the extent to which organizational members *build* and *use* these power bases in the service of decision-making, resource allocation and achievement of goals. 'Positional power' represents the power afforded by an individual's position. Positional power may derive from authority inherent in a position as well as real or perceived ability to administer rewards and/or punishment. In the context of organizational political climate, organizational members will perceive that people *build* their positional power by seeking positions in which they will be able to exert significant influence and in which they will have control over significant resources. Organizational members may perceive that people *use* their positional power by using their position to amend or introduce policies, influence recruitment decisions, bend the rules to fit situations, or influence the allocation of rewards. As highlighted earlier, these practices could be perceived positively or negatively and contribute to a functional or dysfunctional organizational political climate. For example, organizational leaders could be perceived to use their positional power positively by implementing policies that result in greater fairness and transparency in the allocation of rewards. The same power could be used negatively to make rewards accessible to themselves and favored others.

'Personal power' represents the power associated with reputation, charm, charisma, worth and right to respect from others (Bass, 1960; French & Raven, 1959). It incorporates power bases such as referent power, expert power (Atwater & Yammarino, 1996) and charisma (Kudisch, Poteet, Dobbins, Rush, & Russell, 1995). In a strong organizational political climate, building and use of personal power will be commonplace. Indicators will include competition to be involved in high profile projects, recognition that personal reputation is important to career progression, and high significance attached to status symbols such as titles, qualifications and office size and location. In a functional organizational political climate, individuals could be perceived to build their reputation and personal power based on demonstrated expertise, experience and success. In contrast, in a dysfunctional organizational political climate, individuals could be perceived to build their personal power based on exaggerated claims of expertise, experience and success which potentially benefits the individual at the expense of the organization.

'Informational power' is the third power base depicted in Fig. 1. Raven (2008) suggested that informational power is evidenced by convincing others to comply based on clear, logical information. Hersey et al. (1979) defined informational power as "possession of or access to information that is valuable to others" (p. 419). As depicted in the proposed model, informational power can derive from formal access to information (e.g., meetings, draft policies, position papers), informal access to information (e.g. watercooler talk, grapevine), as well as output or distribution opportunities. People may be perceived to *build* informational power when they invest considerable time and energy mapping the political terrain, trying to understand others' agendas, or using the grapevine to gain information. People may be perceived to *use* informational power when it is perceived that people need to know the 'real' way to get things done, and when the withholding, filtering and selective leaking of information is commonplace. As was the case with the other power bases, these practices could be perceived positively and negatively and could lead to an organizational political climate which is perceived as functional or dysfunctional.

Finally, 'connection power', the fourth power base included in Fig. 1, as proposed by Hersey et al. (1979), is related to the notion of networking and relationship building. The importance of networking and relationship building is widely recognized in the organizational politics literature (e.g., Kurchner-Hawkins & Miller, 2006; Zanzi & O'Neill, 2001). Connection power can be derived from internal networks, external networks and network centrality. Assessment of this dimension at an organizational climate level would, for example, be focused on the extent to which people 'around here' perceive that people invest considerable time and effort aligning themselves with important people, that people are more likely to do things for influential people, and that people get ahead based on who they know. Again, these activities could be perceived to be positive and negative, and result in functional and dysfunctional outcomes. For example, employees could build or cultivate networks to help ensure that their work is relevant to core business activities and will have advocates at higher decision-making levels. On the other hand, individuals could build networks to enable their progression at the expense of others regardless of their actual or potential skill and competence.

In summary, the four power bases provide a comprehensive account of how an organizational political climate emerges and is maintained. Perceptions of the extent to which people build and use power bases to influence decision-making, resource allocation and achievement of goals provide insight into the organizational political climate. As highlighted throughout this discussion, it is

proposed that the practices associated with an organizational political climate can be perceived positively and negatively, and can lead to a functional or dysfunctional organizational political climate. This proposition will now be examined further.

2.3. Organizational political climate—functional and dysfunctional?

As highlighted earlier, the majority of organizational politics researchers have demonstrated the negative, dysfunctional consequences of organizational politics (e.g., Kacmar & Carlson, 1998). A minority of organizational politics researchers have, however, persuasively argued in support of a more balanced, functional and positive perspective on organizational politics (e.g., Albrecht, 2006; Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2002; Block, 1987; Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Fedor & Maslyn, 2002; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010; Kurchner-Hawkins & Miller, 2006; Liu et al., 2010; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). These and other researchers have argued that organizational politics can be both good and bad (Hochwarter, Ferris, Laird, Treadway, & Gallagher, 2010), can play an important functional role in innovation (Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006; Pfeffer, 1992a), organizational decision-making (Drory, 1993; Feldman, 1988; Lewis, 2002; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974; Tushman, 1977; Yang, 2003) and organizational change (Buchanan & Badham, 1999, 2008; Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006; Kumar & Thibodeaux, 1990; Lewis, 2002), and that politics is critical to organizational functioning (Hochwarter et al., 2010). The key conclusion here is that organizational politics can potentially result in functional organizational outcomes.

Limited empirical support for the positive and functional outcomes associated with a functional organizational political climate can be found in the research literature (Buchanan & Badham, 1999, 2008; Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980; Zahra, 1984). Buchanan and Badham, for example, on the basis of interview and questionnaire data, concluded that organizational politics can benefit organizations and individuals through improved communication, the achieving of organizational goals and objectives, improved decision-making, individual career advancement, the provision of individual recognition, the promotion of new ideas, and the building of networks of useful contacts.

Positive political behaviors and tactics such as those described by Farrell and Petersen (1982) and Zanzi and O'Neill (2001) can also contribute to generalized perceptions of a functional organizational political climate. Zanzi and O'Neill, for instance, found that behaviors and tactics perceived as being socially desirable included coalition building, use of expertise, linking to super-ordinate goals, image building, networking, and persuasion. They further proposed that these 'sanctioned political tactics' could be used positively to inspire cooperation in the achievement of organizational goals.

We argue that just as individual political behaviors and tactics can be positive and negative, so too can the organizational political climate be functional and dysfunctional. Coalition forming and networking, for example, can be conceptualized at the climate level as shared perceptions about the building and use of connection power. Similarly, image building and use of expertise can be conceptualized as shared perceptions about the building and use of personal power.

Drory and Vigoda-Gadot (2010) argued that the motivations of organizational members who are involved in organizational politics shape whether human resource management is positive and constructive or negative and destructive. They suggested that positive human resource management develops when organizational members are focused on the best interests of the organization and that negative human resource management develops when organizational members are motivated by self-interest. Extending their argument to the level of organizational political climate, perceived motives or intentions regarding whether behaviors are undertaken in self-interest or in the best interests of the organization will be a key determinant in whether the organizational political climate is functional or dysfunctional. The examples provided earlier regarding each of the power bases demonstrate this concept.

In summary, empirical research provides support for both positive and negative conceptualizations of organizational politics and associated outcomes. Self-interest versus organization interest is a key factor in defining whether the organizational political climate is functional or dysfunctional. Survey questions designed to assess the organizational political climate, in contrast to existing measures (e.g., POPS), will therefore need to accommodate and recognize the positive and negative dimensions of the construct and the functional and dysfunctional outcomes associated with it.

3. Implications for HR practitioners

3.1. Practical implications for HR practitioners

The preceding discussion has highlighted the importance, impact, multi-dimensionality, and complexity of organizational politics. What does this mean, at a practical level, for HR practitioners? We suggest that HR practitioners should not endeavor to eradicate organizational politics; rather, they should recognize it as an organizational reality and develop and implement systems, policies, practices and procedures in support of a functional organizational political climate.

The building and use of power bases provide a framework that HR practitioners can use to inform their strategies for organizational effectiveness. HR practitioners should shape organizational initiatives with the goal of empowering all organizational members and making them aware of how to recognize, build and use the range of power bases available to them. These initiatives should endeavor to ensure informed and open discourse about organizational politics that results in a constructive and functional organizational political climate characterized by a focus on the greater good through the achievement of organizational goals in an environment of trust, respect, involvement, and transparency.

Enabling employees at all levels to understand, build and use their connection power brings to mind a range of potential HR initiatives. For example, internal networking opportunities could be included in orientation or induction activities. Other

networking opportunities could include internal cross-functional teams, internal social networking sites, organizational alumni groups, professional conferences and networking events.

As another example, initiatives to encourage understanding, building and use of personal power could include opportunities for all employees to build their expertise and reputation through involvement in high profile projects and important presentations. Internal social networking sites could allow individuals to build their profile and highlight their specific skills, qualifications and areas of expertise. Consistent with researchers' recommendations that leaders and managers develop political strategies such as coalition building, mentoring, persuasion and networking in order to be effective in their working environments (Albrecht, 2006; Block, 1987; Pfeffer, 1992b), HR practitioners could also implement workshops aimed at developing individuals' political skill.

At an organizational level, workshops could educate organizational members about the reality and functionality of organizational politics as a decision-making and goal-achieving framework or lens through which organizations can be viewed (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Greiner & Schein, 1988). Researchers have suggested that if there is a lack of congruence between how employees desire their organization to function, and how it actually functions, this results in dissatisfaction, frustration and intention to leave (Schneider, 1980). Such workshops should aim to develop a shared understanding that a political model is a more accurate representation of how organizations and managers really function when contrasted with a rational/bureaucratic or collegial/consensus model (Greiner & Schein, 1988). These workshops could specifically address the difference between functional and dysfunctional political climates— drawing on organizational members' perceptions and incorporating the distinction between activities undertaken in the best interests of the organization or the individual. Organizational members could potentially develop a framework of acceptable and unacceptable political practices. The espoused and 'in-use' (Argyris & Schön, 1978) values of the organization could usefully be reinforced and aligned at such workshops.

In summary, HR practitioners need not deny or aim to eradicate organizational politics. Instead, they should develop and implement a range of systems, policies, practices, procedures and workshops to support the establishment and maintenance of a functional political climate. HR initiatives should empower organizational members by developing an understanding of the positive and constructive building and use of power bases in the best interests of the organization.

3.2. Future research to support HR practitioners

For HR practitioners who desire to understand and manage their organizational political climate—whether functional or dysfunctional—appropriate diagnostic measures are needed and such measures do not currently exist. As noted by Fedor and Maslyn (2002), "when it comes to empirically investigating both the positive and negative sides of political behavior, we only assess one side due to the fact that currently available scales reflect a predominantly negative bias (e.g., Kacmar & Ferris, 1991)" (p. 273). Measures are required which allow for an assessment of the positive, negative and neutral multi-dimensional aspects of organizational politics. As noted earlier, it is also important to be clear about the level of analysis at which an examination of organizational politics is conducted. Measures of organizational political climate should clearly target the organizational level with, for example, individual survey respondents answering questions referenced to 'around this organization…' or 'around here….'. More specifically, measures of an organizational political climate will need to focus on practices relevant to each of the four power bases described previously and as shown in Fig. 1.

Qualitative research could usefully be conducted to further inform the dimensions and measures of organizational political climate. To date, there has been limited qualitative research regarding organizational members' perceptions of organizational politics. Commentary by Madison et al. (1980) equally applies today: "behaviors and situations examined in this literature are those which the *researchers* feel are political, irrespective of whether the members of organizations perceive them as political" (p. 80). Opportunities remain to further develop measures of organizational political climate based on organizational members' 'felt experience' (Nafe, 1927; Young, 1930) of organizational politics in contemporary organizational contexts. Additionally, organizations will need to customize diagnostics to ensure that all relevant dimensions of organizational politics are included in any interventions HR managers and line managers may choose to undertake.

Research is also required to develop a clearer understanding of the antecedent and moderating conditions which influence both the extent to which organizational politics is perceived, as well as whether it is perceived positively or negatively (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). It would be helpful to HR practitioners if researchers could clearly and comprehensively identify the antecedents and outcomes most strongly associated with an organizational political climate. Such an understanding would provide HR practitioners with practical guidance about which organizational features have the most impact and where to best focus their efforts.

Finally, organizational politics research has been criticized for being "largely atheoretical" and "restrictive in its choice and use of theory" (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011, p. 444). The theoretical frameworks which, to date, have been employed have largely focused on understanding the detrimental effects of organizational politics using theories such as social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and stress theories (Beehr, 1995; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) where politics is framed as a stressor (Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009). Recently, researchers have referred to alternative theories that better allow for the potentially positive and functional aspects of organizational politics. Hochwarter et al. (2010), for example, referenced Warr's (1987) Vitamin Model of employee well-being and Gardner and Cummings (1988) Activation Theory of Stress to explain that a minimum level of politics is needed to provide social cues regarding how to behave and also to activate motivation to achieve goals. However, there remains a need for theoretical frameworks which more comprehensively encompass the construct of organizational politics and which describe and explains its functioning within a comprehensive nomological net. Power theories (French & Raven, 1959), as described herein, help to address this need.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, research regarding organizational politics has demonstrated that organizational politics is negative and detrimental to organizational effectiveness, yet also pervasive. However, we have here argued that organizational politics should not be exclusively defined in terms of self-serving, non-sanctioned behaviors which result in dysfunctional organizational outcomes. Instead, it should be recognized that politics can be both functional and dysfunctional and that it can have an important role in organizational decision-making and change.

Furthermore, we have argued that organizational politics can usefully be assessed as a multi-dimensional climate construct at the organizational level of analysis where dimensions are informed by four power bases of positional power, personal power, connection power and informational power. We have proposed a definition of organizational political climate that is based on shared perceptions of the building and use of power bases in organizational practices and workarounds regarding policies and procedures to influence organizational decision-making, resource allocation and achievement of goals. We have also argued that perceived self interest versus organizational interest is a key factor in defining whether the organizational political climate is functional or dysfunctional.

Overall, we argue that HR practitioners cannot afford to ignore organizational politics nor be fully focused on endeavoring to eradicate it. Instead, they should implement strategies to support all organizational members to understand, build and use power bases in the service of the greater good and focus on developing other aspects of organizational climate such as trust, respect and involvement that will support a positive political climate.

We look forward to future studies which aim to uncover the good and bad of organizational political climate and its associated dimensions and which support HR practitioners to foster a positive political climate within their organizations.

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