

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON POLITICAL PERCEPTION OF THE ORGANIZATION AND JOB BURNOUT AMONG CHINESE CIVIL SERVANTS

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relations between the Perception of Organizational Politics as the independent variable and Job Burnout as the dependent variable. The study was conducted focusing on a special and important group of professionals: Chinese civil servants. The perception of Organizational Politics has shown a positive relationship with Job Burnout. The dimensions of Perception of Organizational Politics have been found to have positive correlation with those of Job Burnout.

1. INTRODUCTION

Job Burnout is a psychological syndrome and comprehensive phenomenon that may result from the individual's long-term energy depletion and working enthusiasm degradation, thus producing indifferences to people and a negative attitude towards job performances [1]. The first "Shanghai job burnout survey" [2] showed that 40% of individuals felt job burnout. Another survey on job burnout index [3] showed that 70% of respondents had job burnout, and 13% of them were in a high state of job burnout. Of civil servant group surveyed in the latter study, 54.6% of them had job burnout, the highest percentage among all groups in this survey. The surveys indicate that China may be heading into a peak stage of job burnout, and that civil servants are among the groups with higher burnout levels.

Perception of organizational politics refers to the subjective evaluation of organization staff of the extent of self-interest behavior in the work environment [4]. Studies found that there will not be severe adverse effects if personal perception indicates few political behaviors even in an organization where political behaviors prevail [5]. That is to say, the measurement of the level of an individual's perception of organizational politics is of more importance than the measurement of organizational political behaviors. In summary, if individuals have higher perception of organizational politics, it tends to cause emotional dissatisfaction, and tends to have more adverse effects to the organization or to the individual. As a result, the operational efficiency of organization would decrease.

Therefore, whether a person having higher level of perception of organizational political behavior will lead to higher level of suffering of job burnout is the main focus of this study.

2. ISSUES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Fogarty [6] pointed out that organizational politics was one of stressors associated with work, and when

psychological stress reached certain intensity, a potential result was energy declination and emotional collapse. Job burnout is strain of the body and anxiety of the mind which is resulted from individuals' detection of the disharmony between environmental demands and conditions for meeting needs. Existing empirical researches on job burnout show that the factors of work condition full of human conflicts and complex social network is one of the main reasons that produce psychological burnout.

There are relatively few exit paths for Chinese civil servant if they decide not to continue their career as a civil servant. This situation puts more pressure on the survival of an individual Chinese civil servant; therefore, there are more intensive competition for resources and opportunities [7]. Based on the conservation of resources theory, the increase of self-interested behaviors of individuals will accelerate the depletion of resources, and members will work inefficiently as well, which will further lead to a negative attitude towards work [8]. Employees feel that they have little decision-making power and thus have diminished job satisfaction [9]. Therefore, it is easier for a civil servant to cumulate negative emotions than those in other professions.

Existing researches have identified that organizational atmosphere, organizational centralization and interpersonal disputes will reduce job performances and satisfaction, and they will result in negative attitudes [10]. In order to further explore the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job burnout, two hypothetical propositions are proposed:

Hypothesis H1: the perception of organizational politics has a significantly positive impact on job burnout.

Hypothesis H2: the dimensions of perception of organizational politics have a significantly positive impact on that of job burnout.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection Methods and Sample Structure

The study surveyed Chinese civil servants working in a wide range of departments in an eastern province near Shanghai. A total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed and 702 questionnaires were returned. The number of usable questionnaire is 649, accounts for 65% of total questionnaires distributed. Table 1 below shows the demographics of the survey correspondents. The 40% of samples of this study are male, 59.9% women, 67.2% unmarried and 32.8% married. Most of participants are those whose age ranges from 26 to 30 and the total is 109 which account for 39.4% of all samples, followed by 31 to 35, the total is 67, 24.19%. There are totally 143 who have received college education, 51.6% of all samples, followed by specialist qualifications, there are 91, 32.9% of samples.

3.2 The Survey Instrument

In this study, the survey instrument of perception of organizational politics was composed from the "organization of political perception questionnaire" by Kacmar and Ferris in 1991 and 1992 [11], the "political perception of the organization questionnaires" by Nye and Witt in 1993 [12], "scales of

perception of organizational politics” by Kacmar and Carlson in 1997 [13] and Ma’s perception of organizational politics questionnaires [14]. For the case of civil servants, 16 items were selected to be measured on a five-point Likert scale.

From the specific options presented by the content features, these variables could be grouped into three factors: political perception of individuals, political perceptions of small groups, and political perception of leaders, according to the content of various factors. We calculated Cronbach's α of the three dimensions and they resulted in 0.774, 0.715 and 0.551, and the extracted three factors could explain 58.48% of the total variance.

The study employed the third edition of Maslach’s Burnout Inventory [15] to measure Chinese civil servants’ job burnout. They were all measured on a 5-point Likert type scale. We tested the translated instrument with a focus group, and the result with the focus group showed that items 8 and 15 had low power of differentiation; these two items were thus deleted. With the remaining 14 items, the Cronbach's α of the emotional exhaustion is 0.879, of cynicism 0.816, and of diminished personal accomplishment 0.752. The three factors extracted explain 64.81% of the total variance.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Analysis of Reliability and Validity

Before the main analysis of hypothesis test, according to the two instruments of organizational politics and job burnout, by means of LISREL 8.70 and SPSS 11.0, this study tests whether the score of each item is significantly relevant to scale scores with inspection methods of internal coherence [16]. Randomly selected 323 samples and made exploratory factor analysis for perception of organizational politics, half of which were made as confirmatory factor analysis.

In the scale of perception of organizational politics there were five factor loadings less than 0.4, deleted items 2, 3, 4, 11 and 13 and Three factors from the remaining 11 items were extracted and the final result could be reached after the variance rotation of common factors. KMO is 0.812. BARTLETT is 1764.4. Three factors extracted to explain the value of the total variance is 58.48%. After the validity of job burnout was tested and analyzed, results showed identification degree of items 8 and 15 were low and therefore deleted then. There were 14 items reserved for factor analysis. Three factors from the remaining 14 items were extracted and the final result could be reached after the variance rotation of common factors. KMO is 0.876. BARTLETT is 4255.7, three factors extracted to explain the value of the total variance is 64.81%.

Table 1 Fitted Value of Index of Organizational Politics Perceptions’ Scale

Index	DF	X2	P	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Index Value	41	251.02	0.0	0.87	0.88	0.88	0.93	0.89	0.089

Results of further confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) show that the reliability of other dimensions are all above 0.72, in addition that the reliability of dimensions of political behaviors of leaders is slightly low indicating that two scales of this study have better reliability. The AVE of each factor is larger than 0.42. It is larger than correlated coefficients in corresponding ranks.

Table 2 Fitted Value of Index of Maslach Burnout Inventory

Index	DF	X2	P	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Index Value	74	304.17	0.0	0.91	0.93	0.93	0.92	0.89	0.079

4.2. Correlation Analysis of Perceptions of Organizational Politics and Job Burnout

The study firstly used the analysis of Pearson's correlation coefficients to measure the correlation between organizational politics and job burnout and its dimensions (political behaviors of small groups, political behaviors of individuals and political perception of leaders), also to measure the relationship between organizational politics and job burnout and its three dimensions (emotional exhaustion, cynicism and diminished personal accomplishment).

The assuming of H1 results supported. It shows perception of organizational politics and job burnout had a significantly positive relationship. Results of assumption H2 is supported, which shows that political perception of small groups, organizational politics, have a significantly positive relationship with job burnout ($r=0.046$, $p<0.01$), political behaviors of small groups have the highest influence on job burnout ($r=0.430$, $p<0.01$), political perception of behavior the lowest impact ($r=0.187$, $p<0.01$). Political behaviors of small groups are of more obvious impact on the individual perception than political behaviors of individuals.

Results of assumption H21 are approved, this shows that the perception of organizational politics of small groups has the highest influence on job burnout ($r=0.430$, $p<0.01$), political perception of small groups has the highest correlation with emotional exhaustion of job burnout ($r=0.411$, $p=0.01$), the lowest relation with reduced personal accomplishment. Results of assumption H22 gain acceptance. This impact is the lowest ($r=0.187$, $p<0.01$). The political perception of individuals have a positive relationship with job burnout ($r=0.187$, $p<0.01$). There are no significant correlations between the political perception of individuals and emotional exhaustion ($r=0.04$, $P>0.05$) and cynicism ($r=0.019$, $p>0.05$) of job burnout, however, political perceptions of individuals have a remarkable correlation with diminished personal accomplishment ($r= 0.308$, $p<0.01$). Results of assumption H23 were supported, the political perception of leaders was closed to the three dimensions' related coefficients of job burnout ($r=0.262$, $r=0.209$, $r=0.290$, $p<0.01$).

4.3. Analysis of Structural Equation Model

The research mainly discusses the relations between three dimensions of organizational politics perceptions and those of job burnout by means of the structure equation model.

(1) Basic fitting standards: factor loadings of variables on indicators range from 0.46 to 0.90, and all reach the significant level of 0.05 with no negative measurement errors. This suggests the model fully satisfies the fitting standards.

(2) Evaluation of the structural equation model: fitting results of model M1 outputted by LISREL 8.70. In addition that NFI is 0.88, slightly less than 0.90. All other indicators conform to ideal result which shows the model fitting is well. Results suggest the perception of organizational politics and job burnout have a significantly positive relationship.

Table 3 Model Fitting's Index Values of the Perception of Organizational Politics and Job Burnout

Index	DF	X2	P	NFI	NNFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Index Value	263	993.76	0.00	0.88	0.90	0.91	0.91	0.92	0.89	0.065

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings

Analysis of the structural model showed that the perception of organizational politics is high positively related to job burnout when individuals realized that political behaviors within the organization were serious. Dimensions of organizational politics perceptions and those of job burnout were also found to have a positive correlation.

In this study, the political perception of small groups of organizational politics was the most relevant to various dimensions of job burnout, which explains that political behaviors of small groups of Chinese civil servants have remarkable impact on job burnout. In public sectors characterized by bureaucracy, the phenomenon of “Baotuan” (“forming of and operation according to factions”) and political behaviors of leaders are more serious and political behaviors of individual are more common [9]. While the political perception of individuals was highly related to reduced self-efficacy, it was not, however, significantly associated with emotional exhaustion and cynicism. This indicates that when civil servants perceive other people's political behaviors, they would doubt their own ability to perform, and their self-fulfillment was greatly reduced with plain emotional reactions and no cynicism. The finding did not agree with findings of earlier studies in other industries.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The findings in this study suggested that there needs to be emphasis on the management of political behaviors of small groups, political behaviors of leaders, and political behaviors of individuals, in order to equip individuals with higher professional qualities. When the above new management strategy is adopted, the job burnout components for Chinese civil servants can be reduced, and at the same time the

civil servants' confidence and efficiency can be improved. The administrators of government departments should take great effort in controlling the behaviors of small groups, as well as the political behaviors of leaders within the department. By doing so, an organizational climate of fairness would be formed, innovation and creativity would be fostered, and the image of government would be improved.

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