How perceptions of organizational politics influence self-determined motivation: The mediating role of work mood

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between perceptions of organizational politics (POPs) and self-determined work motivation has yet to be understood rigorously. Drawing on self-determination theory, affective event theory, and emotion-associated theories, we propose (1) that organizational politics is a crucial factor affecting self-determined motivation in organizations and (2) that work mood (e.g. anxiety and depression) is a psychological mediator affected by POPs and affecting self-determined motivation. We tested the model by using a Taiwanese sample of considerable variability in gender, hierarchical level, and tenure. Analysis results indicate that POPs diminish intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and controlled extrinsic motivation, but increase amotivation. Anxiety is a partial mediator in the POPs—intrinsic motivation, POPs—autonomous extrinsic motivation, and POPs—controlled extrinsic motivation relationships, but anxiety does not mediate the relationship between POPs and amotivation. In contrast, depression is a partial mediator in the POPs—intrinsic motivation and POPs—amotivation relationships, and it is a complete mediator in the POPs—autonomous extrinsic motivation and POPs—controlled extrinsic motivation relationships. Given that work motivation is an important determinant of employee work behaviors; our results specify a possible link between POPs and employee outcomes. The distinct mediating roles of anxiety and depression in the POPs-work motivation relationships imply that different types of political behavior might induce distinctive work moods that produce divergent organizational outcomes.

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1. Introduction

A large body of research has demonstrated the influence of organizational politics on organization outcomes (Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002). Organizational politics means “a social influence process in which behavior is strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest, which is at the expense of others’ interests” (Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pondy, 1989). Whether political behavior proves beneficial or harmful to organizations may depend on how that behavior is perceived rather than on reality (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Perceptions of organizational politics (POPs) involve people’s attribution of others’ behaviors to self-serving intent, and are defined more specifically as “an individual’s subjective evaluation about the extent to which the work environment is characterized by coworkers and supervisors who demonstrate such self-serving behavior” (Ferris, Harrell-Cook, & Dulebohn, 2000, p. 90).

POPs are based on the perceiver’s interpretation of individually experienced events and the behaviors of others, even if this interpretation is a misperception of actual events (Ferris, Frink, Bawuk, Zhou, & Gilmore, 1996). Previous researchers have argued that a highly political environment is associated with a variety of such adverse effects on work life as high stress, high turnover intention, low worker satisfaction, weak commitment, detrimental organizational citizenship behavior, and low productivity; thus, organizational productivity and profitability suffer (Chang, Rosen, Siemieniec, & Johnson, R., 2012; Ferris et al., 2002; Harris, Harris, & Harvey, 2007; Kacmar & Baron, 1999).
Despite prior research has suggested that POPs influence work behaviors and organizational outcomes, the mechanism of linkage relationships are not fully understood. This study explored the mediating role of work mood on the basis of affective events theory. According to affective events theory (AET), work environment in general and work events in particular lead to affective reactions experienced at work, which then influence work attitudes and work behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Recent research has claimed that POPs are affect-laden events likely to elicit intensely emotional responses (Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009; Thiel, Hill, Griffith, & Connelly, 2014). As such, the effects of the emotional aspects of POPs on work motivation merit further exploration. In addition, research based on self-determination theory (SDT) has demonstrated that motivation is affected by environmental factors through their effects on psychological mediators, in turn yielding organizational and individual outcomes (Vallerand, 1997). We therefore propose here that organizational politics is a crucial environmental factor and that work mood is a psychological mediator affected by POPs and affecting self-determined motivation.

By drawing on SDT, this study examines the relationship between POPs and self-determined motivation as well as the mediating role of work mood. SDT identifies four types of self-determined motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The primary difference between SDT and most other work motivation theories is that SDT focuses on the relative strength of autonomous versus controlled motivation rather than on total amount of motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). POPs are likely to influence employee perception of autonomy because employees do not know which actions are appropriate in a highly political environment. Previous research has confirmed that POPs are a crucial factor eliciting negative affective reactions (Ferris et al., 1996; Harris & Kacmar, 2005). Recent research has proposed that frustration mediates the path between POPs and several employee behavioral outcomes including job satisfaction, task performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and turnover intention (Rosen et al., 2009). A thorough literature review asserted that, in terms of emotional aspects, the link between POPs and work motivation had rarely been a subject of analysis, despite the effort being worthwhile (Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008).

Accordingly, the present study explores the effects of POPs on four types of self-determined motivation, namely intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, controlled extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Furthermore, this study clarifies the mediating role of anxiety and depression in the relationship between POPs and self-determined motivation.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

We use affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) as a base to explain how anxiety and depression mediate the effects of POPs on self-determined motivation. Affective events theory suggests that features of the work environment are associated with affective episodes. Following an interpretive appraisal, such episodes or events elicit intense emotional reactions from employees. AET posits that these affective experiences have consequences for work behaviors and attitudes. Previous research declares that employees respond in negative way to their POPs in the workplace (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris, Fedor et al., 1989; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). According to AET, the events that have been appraised as threatening to employees’ goal achievement or well-being lead to more negative emotions (e.g. anxiety and depression) (Rosen et al., 2009). Based on this theoretical framework, research hypotheses in this study are developed in the following section.

2.1. POPs and work motivation

Work motivation is a set of energetic forces that originate within as well as beyond a person’s being, and initiate work-related behavior and determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration (Pinder, 1998, p. 11). In other words, motivation involves having an intention to act, whereas amotivation means a lack of intention to act (Harris et al., 2007).

Classic work motivation theorists proposed the model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Porter & Lawler, 1968). In self-determination theory, extrinsic work motivation is categorized into autonomous and controlled extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Autonomous extrinsic motivation comprises identified regulation, which is a moderately autonomous motivation, and integrated regulation, which is an autonomous motivation. Controlled extrinsic motivation comprises external regulation, which is a controlled motivation, and introjected regulation, which is a moderately controlled motivation. Along the controlled-to-autonomous continuum (Gagné & Deci, 2005), intrinsic motivation is an inherently autonomous form of motivation because people act entirely volitionally and feel interested in the activity. Autonomous extrinsic motivation is relatively less autonomous because it is a behavioral regulation for which the related values have been internalized and, thus, no longer require the presence of an external contingency, such as recognition and feelings of guilt. By contrast, controlled extrinsic motivation is considered to be externally regulated, and is initiated and maintained by external stimuli (e.g., to receive a raise or to feel worthy). The current study follows the postulated typology of SDT to distinguish four types of self-determined motivation: intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, controlled extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

According to SDT, the environment influences motivation through perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy means that people are in control of their lives, independent, and self-reliant, resulting in a central feeling that their own behavior is self-motivated and emerging from genuine interest (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competence involves self-efficacy, which is a feeling that one can gain skills to accomplish and overcome obstacles. Relatedness is the need to engage in warm relationships with others and is associated with reduced work strain (McAdams & Bryant, 1987). Social contexts that offer people an opportunity to satisfy the three basic needs activate different self-determined types of motivation, whereas events that prevent these needs from being satisfied produce non-self-determined types of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

POPs may be detrimental to intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are those performed by people for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from performing them (Gagné & Deci, 2005). People who engage in an activity because they find it interesting are partaking in the activity entirely of their own volition. However, POPs are associated with uncertainty about organizational decisions and ambiguity about expectations, procedures, and roles (Ferris et al., 2002; Ferris, Fedor et al., 1989; Ferris, Russ et al., 1989; Kacmar & Baron, 1999). This pattern leads employees to feel indecisive when facing the possibility of taking action and undermines the enjoyment derived from doing a task. POPs are also related to low job autonomy (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992) and are expected to reduce intrinsic motivation in turn. Therefore, we predict that POPs are negatively related to intrinsic motivation.

Hypothesis 1a. POPs are negatively related to intrinsic motivation.

POPs may reduce autonomous external motivation. Being autonomously extrinsically motivated requires that employees...
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