

## Analysis of the Perception of Organizational Politics by Employees of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The study examined the nature of perception of organizational politics by workers in a Nigerian university. Three hundred and seventy two (academic and non-academic) staff of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife filled Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS). Data were analysed to show the most commonly perceived organisational politics and the relationships among these dimensions of perceived organisational politics. The results identified seven dimensions of perception of organizational politics which were: General Political Behaviour (GPB), Go Along to get Ahead (GAA), Pay and Promotion Policies (PPP), General Political Behaviour and Go Along to get Ahead (GPB and GAA), General Political Behaviour and Pay and Promotion Policies (GPB and PPP) and all three (GPB, GAA and PPP). The results revealed that Go Along to Get Ahead (35.5%) was perceived most by workers of Obafemi Awolowo University. Furthermore, the study showed that non-academic staff significantly perceived organizational politics more than the academic staff.*

### Introduction

Researchers in the past decades have worked extensively in the area of politics in the organization. The reality of scarce resources and conflict of interest has made politics in the organization inevitable. While some researchers regard politics as being positive and necessary for managers (Buchanan, 1999; Butcher and Clarke 2002; Hartley and Branicki, 2006; Vigoda, 2000), others see it as being maladaptive and reflective of the presence of injustice, mistrust, threat and self-serving (Buchanan and Huczynski 2004; Cropanzano, Kacmar and Bozeman., 1995; Pfeffer 1981).

As ubiquitous as the concept is, defining it is not straight forward, several researchers have tried to define it (Cropanzano *et al.* 1995, Drory and Romm 1990, Ferris, Russ and Fandt, 1989). One reason for this according to Doldor (2007) is the increase in terminologies, such as: political climate, political behaviours, political tactics, political skills, influence tactics and political influence behaviour associated with workplace place that are used interchangeably. Thus, there is no generally acceptable definition. Careful examination of existing literature however has, according to Kacmar and Ferris (1991), generated three aspects of the concept that are common in the literature. These are: general political behaviour, which includes the behaviours of individuals who act in a self-serving manner to obtain valued outcomes; go along to get ahead, which consists of a lack of action by individuals (e.g., remain silent) in order to secure valued outcomes; and pay and promotion policies, which involves the organization behaving politically through the policies it enacts (Kacmar and Carlson 1997).

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Nigerian organizations have been commonly regarded as being political. People believe you cannot be employed, promoted or even progress in an organization without, perhaps belonging to a particular clique or have a god-father. Unemployment rate in Nigeria, according to the National Bureau of Statistics 2009 is about 19.7%. Even those employed are getting laid off to join the increasing numbers of the unemployed. Therefore, any individual who has a job with some level of security and opportunity for career growth may want to do anything to, keep the job. Thus, since politics got the individual the job in the first instance, sustaining, climbing higher and at record time, in the hierarchy of the organization, by extension would be through belongingness.

Obafemi Awolowo University is one of the first generation universities in Nigeria. The workforce, both the academic and non academic staff; is heterogeneous in nature. This consequently divides the workforce into social classes, where individuals from similar ethnic group or geographical location band together. Also, there is always a constant tension between the management and the workers, manifested in endless strike actions; primarily due to lack of trust – one of the potent determinants of organizational politics.

As common place as politics is in Nigeria's organizations, there has been little or no empirical study in this regard. The purpose of this study, therefore, was based on Kacmar and Ferris (1991) classification of organizational politics, to assess the nature of organizational politics in a Nigerian university

### **Methodology**

As mentioned above this is a survey to assess the nature of organizational politics among workers of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. In this wise, organizational politics was analysed according to its dimensions of General Political Behaviour (GPB), Go Along to Get Ahead (GAA) and Pay and Promotion Policies (PPP) and combination of these.

*Participants:* The study population comprised of 3,732. The non-teaching staff strength is 2,653 while that of the teaching staff is 1,079. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select 10% of this population for inclusion in the study. The final sample consisted of 372 (122 females and 250 males) workers of the University. Eighty (21.5%) were junior non-academic staff, while one hundred and eighty-five (49.7%) were senior non-academic staff. Fifty-three (14.2%) were junior academic staff, while fifty-four (14.5%) were senior academic staff. The age ranged from 24 to 62 years, with a mean age of 42.40 years and the standard deviation is 8.49 years. The years in service of the participants ranged from 1 to 38 years with a mean length of service of 13.66 years. The mean 'years in service' is 13.66, and the standard deviation is 9.97 years.

*Measure:* The instrument used for this study was the 15-item Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). The internal consistency reliability estimate

(Cronbach alpha) was 0.88. The scale includes items such as “People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down”; “Agreeing with powerful others is the best alternative in this organization.” and “When it comes to pay raise and promotion decisions, policies are irrelevant.” Respondents recorded their views on each statement on a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), don’t know (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). These responses were scored by the numbers attached. The item scores were summed for the dimensions outlined above.

*Procedure:* The research instruments were administered to respondents in their work places. The consents of selected workers were sought, rapport established; thus making them friendly, cooperative and encouraged to fill in the questionnaire honestly. The number of workers selected in a particular unit determined the number of questionnaires that was administered in the unit/department.

**Results**

To achieve the study objective, scores on POPS were analysed according to the three dimensions of General Political Behaviour (GPB), Go Along to get Ahead (GAA) and Pay and Promotion Policies (PPP). To achieve this, a new set of norms was calculated for the three dimensions. These figures are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Mean and the Standard Deviation of the Three Dimensions of Organizational Politics**

	General Political Behaviour	Go Along to Get Ahead	Pay and Promotion Policies
Mean	5.16	21.38	16.11
Median	5.00	21.00	16.00
Std. Deviation	2.22	4.15	3.84

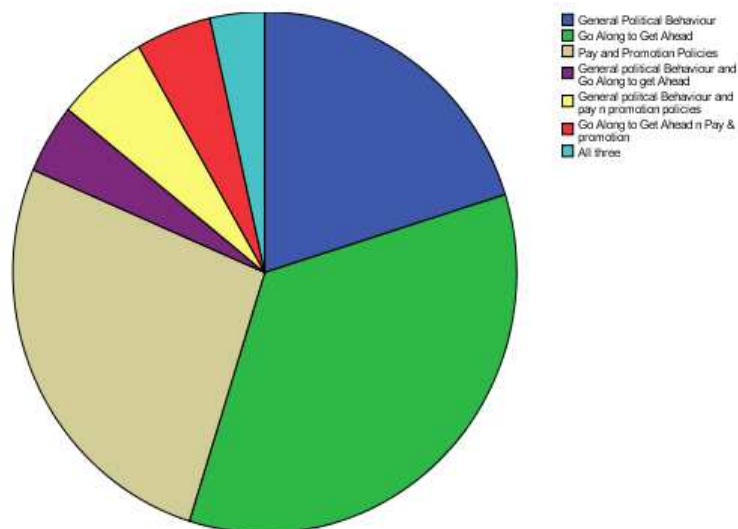
Respondents scoring above the mean on any of the subscales were categorized into that dimension if he/she scored highest on that dimension also. In cases where respondents had equal scores in two or more of the subscales, it was decided to place such respondent into combined categories. Thus, four more combinations comprising of: General Political Behaviour and Go Along to get Ahead (GPB and GAA), General Political Behaviour and Pay and Promotion Policies (GPB and PPP), Go Along to get Ahead and Pay and Promotion Policies (GAA and PPP) and all three (GPB and GAA and PPP) were generated. These four additional categories were added to capture those scores that would ordinarily be lost due to their falling outside the norms of the original dimensions. Participants were put into these different categories depending on the extent at which their scores deviated from the mean on the particular dimension in question. With this categorization, a frequency count of participants falling with each of the seven categories was then calculated. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2 and Figure 2.

The results indicate that of the original three dimensions Go Along to get Ahead is the most visible having been nominated by 132 (35.5%) of the participants. It was followed by Pay and Promotion Policies, nominated by 102 (27.4%) participants. The least visible of the three dimensions is General Political Behaviour, mentioned by 76 (20.4%). Of the remaining 62 participants, 21 (5.6%) mentioned a combination of General Political Behaviour and Pay and Promotion Policies, 16 (4.3%) nominated a

**Table 2: The Descriptive Analysis of the Dimensions of Perception of Organizational Politics**

	Frequency	Percent
General Political Behaviour	76	20.4
Go Along to get Ahead	132	35.5
Pay and Promotion policies	102	27.4
General Political Behaviour and Go Along to Get Ahead	16	4.3
General Political Behaviour and Pay Promotion Policies	21	5.6
Go Along to get Ahead and Pay Promotion Policies	13	3.5
All Three	12	3.2
Total	372	100.0

combination of General Political Behaviour and Go Along to Get Ahead, 13 (3.5%) were aware of a combination General Political Behaviour and Go Along to get Ahead and 12 (3.2%) perceived a combination of all.



**Figure 1: Relative Strengths of the Seven Dimensions of Organization Politics as Perceived by Obafemi Awolowo University Workers**

Table 2 and Figure 1 only revealed the different dimensions of perception of organization politics as discussed above. It, however, did not reveal anything about how the two main groups (academic and non-academic staff) perceive organizational politics. A cross-tabulation of the number of respondents in each category of organizational politics and the four levels of job status was carried out to answer these questions.

The result presented in Table 3 and Figure 2 indicate wide differences in the nature of organizational politics perceived by non-academic and academic staff. Overall, the non-academic staff tend to perceive organizational politics significantly more than academic staff (71% non-academic versus 29% academic nominated one dimension of organizational politics or the other) as shown in the last column of Table 3. There also appeared to be differences in the perception according to whether the staff were of junior or senior cadre. Combination of Junior staff – academic and non-academic reported 35.7% (21.5% non-academic and 14.2% academic); as compared to the combination of Senior Staff – academic and non-academic reported 64.2% (49.7% non-academic and 14.5% academic). These results revealed that Senior staff perceive more organizational politics than the junior staff.

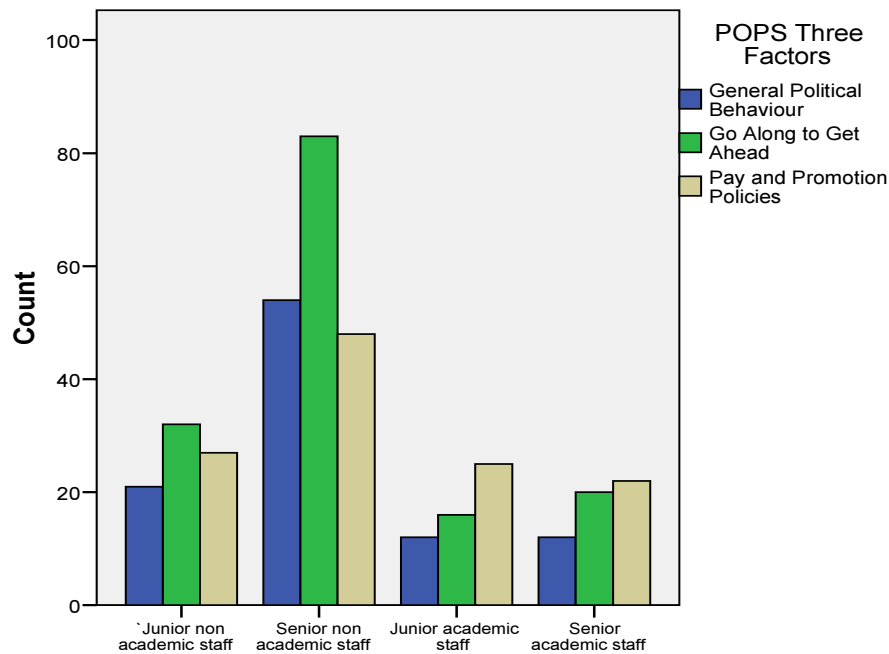


Figure 2: Job Status Differences in the Perception of Organizational Politics with Position

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Perception of Organizational Politics by Position**

Position		Perception of Organization Politics							
		GPB	GAA	PPP	GPB & GAA	GPB & PPP	GAA & PPP	All Three	Total
Junior non academic	Count	13	33	22	2	6	2	2	80
	% of Total	3.5%	8.9%	5.9%	.5%	1.6%	.5%	.5%	21.5%
Senior nonacademic staff	Count	34	66	54	8	9	10	4	185
	% of Total	9.1%	17.7%	14.5%	2.2%	2.4%	2.7%	1.1%	49.7%
Junior academic staff	Count	11	19	14	3	2	1	3	53
	% of Total	3.0%	5.1%	3.8%	.8%	.5%	.3%	.8%	14.2%
Senior academic staff	Count	18	14	12	3	4	0	3	54
	% of Total	4.8%	3.8%	3.2%	.8%	1.1%	.0%	.8%	14.5%
Total	Count	76	132	102	16	21	13	12	372
	% of Total	20.4%	35.5%	27.4%	4.3%	5.6%	3.5%	3.2%	100.0%

To ascertain whether these differences are statistically significant, cross-tabulation (involving only the three original dimensions) was subjected to a chi-square test of independence. The results indicate, using the Pearson Chi-square, that there is no significant association between the three dimensions of perception of organizational politics and the job status of the staff of ObafemiAwolowo University ( $\chi^2 = 8.03$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This finding suggests that workers did not perceive organizational politics differently because of their status.

### Discussion

From the seven dimensions of organizational politics, Go Along to Get Ahead (GAA) is the one perceived most by workers of Obafemi Awolowo University. It has 35.5% of the total population of the workers both academic and non-academic. This means that the participants believe that they have to accept and applaud whatever the superiors or influential people do. This is a culture of silence and complacency.

There may be a number of reasons why this is so. One, Obafemi Awolowo University is an example of a huge government owned organization with various opportunities for career advancement, if you know how to play the game. Playing the game is belonging to the right group. GAA is about conflicting interest in the organization. Drory and Romm, (1990) maintained that conflict is a very vital element in

creating a political environment. There are always more than enough qualified people to occupy any position. Everybody's interest is threatened and each person resort to subtle means to get what they want. The certainty of scarce resources and the inevitability of conflicts in the presence of competing interest provide the fertile environment for Go Along to Get Ahead (GAA).

Comparing the academic with the non-academic, it can be seen that the non-academic perceive more organizational politics than the academic staff. Drory and Romm, 1990; Russ and Fandt 1989; Kacmar and Ferris (1991) opined that political behaviour will thrive in an environment where there are no rules. Notice that the non academic staff perceive politics three times more than the academic. This may be due to the less clear cut rules and policies for promotion in the non teaching section of the university as compared to the academic staff.

The vast differences may show why the non-academic staff of the university engage in more strike actions and militancy than the academic staff. Another reason may be that, while academic staff do not feel despair, the non-academic staff have with regards to their job security. For example, if any academic staffs feel dissatisfied with the terms and condition of work he can easily leave for another university. This is not so easy with the non-academic staff. The non-academic staff therefore, has more to lose if he did not align himself with influential persons. While with the academic staff possession of higher degree means promotion, it does not necessarily mean so with the non-academic.

Comparing the job status with organization politics, the scanty literatures on job status and organization politics are divergent. While Drory and Romm, 1990; Madison, 1980 believe that job status and organizational politics might have a positive relationship; Mao (2006) points out that the organizational level and workplace friendship are negatively correlated. That is, employees of higher organizational level have weaker workplace friendship than employees of lower organizational level. Wen-Wei, Shih-Chin and Shih-I (2009) did not find any significant relationship between organizational level and perception of organizational politics. The research of Nasir and Zaki (2009) also showed the inconclusiveness between job status and job satisfaction. It would have seemed natural that those who are higher should fare better, but their results showed a mixed conclusion. While postgraduate teachers showed a greater degree of job satisfaction than their part time teacher counterparts, teachers holding postgraduate degree qualifications were significantly more satisfied than teachers holding PhDs. This showed that workers perception of organizational variables - organizational politics, for example; is essentially individual and their job status in the organization may have little or no influence.

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