

## Organizational Politics and Job Outcomes: The Moderating Effect of Trust and Social Support

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We propose a model for examining the moderating effect of trust and social support on the relationship between organizational politics and job outcomes. The model was tested empirically using data collected among 142 academics in one of Israel's major research universities. Findings based on interaction effects support the hypothesis that trust and social support are good moderators of the relationship between perceived organizational politics (POPs) and several job outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, stress, burnout). In other words, the potentially negative aftermaths of POPs can be controlled and reduced when trust and social support dominate the intra-organizational climate. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings, as well as recommendations for future studies, are suggested.

Since the 1990s, perceptions of organizational politics (POPs) have been extensively studied and have emerged as a good predictor of job outcomes and job performance (e.g., Drory, 1993; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Valle & Perrewé, 2000; Vigoda-Gadot, 2003; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006). Of particular interest is the negative effect that perceptions of politics seem to have on job outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and on affective performance (e.g., job stress, job burnout), as well as the indirect relationships that potentially mediate or moderate these relationships.

The major goal of this paper is to extend our knowledge regarding the possible indirect effects of POPs on various aspects of job outcomes (attitudinal and affective) by integrating the concepts of trust and social support into the existing work organization discourse. Based on the centrality of the social environment, social capital, and social exchange in workplace studies (e.g., Coleman, 1988, 1994; Dore, 1983; Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997;

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Leana & Van Buren, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Podolny, 1994, 2001; Podolny & Castellucci, 1999; Sorensen, 2000), we develop arguments regarding the role of mutual trust and social support in affecting job outcomes and, more specifically, their potential effect on the association between POPs and job outcomes. The model is based largely on recent advancements in the study of organizational politics and the incorporation of trust as a meaningful concept in this context (e.g., Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002).

Consequently, our theoretical development builds on two conceptual tracks of knowledge: sociology, social constructs, and network analysis (e.g., House, 1981; Nyhan & Marlowe, 1997; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1990); and organization and management studies (e.g., Buchanan, 2007; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 2002). Our secondary goal is to promote an interdisciplinary analysis of the aftermaths of workplace politics and social environment models of organizational structure (Burt, 1992; Lin, 2001). This approach may prove beneficial for both areas, and may significantly advance our understanding of the consequences of organizational politics, especially in the face of the social complexity that is so typical in modern public and private organizations.

## Theory and Hypotheses

### *Organizational Politics*

Organizational politics is an elusive type of power relationship in the workplace. It represents a unique domain of interpersonal relations, characterized by the direct or indirect (active or passive) engagement of people in influence tactics and power struggles. These activities are frequently aimed at securing or maximizing personal interests or, alternatively, avoiding negative outcomes within the organization (Ferris et al., 2002; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). However, they may also be targeted at securing or maximizing collective interests (team, group, organizational, or social) in cases where several decisions are possible that affect different interests.

The number of studies on organizational politics has increased rapidly in recent decades. Vigoda-Gadot and Drory (2006) suggested that the issue is of prime importance to any type of organization, in any field, market, sector, and culture. It has been studied from various perspectives, largely from a behaviorist point of view (e.g., Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) or a cognitive one (e.g., Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). While many theoretical and empirical investigations have been undertaken (e.g., Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Kipnis et al., 1980; Mayes &

Allen, 1977), even today too little is known about the exact nature, boundaries, development, interpretation, and aftermaths of such politics.

Typically, scholars have focused on the negative aspects of organizational politics, seeing it as representative of the dark side of human conduct. Organizational politics has been considered almost synonymous with manipulation, coercive influence tactics, and other subversive and semi-legal actions (e.g., Ferris & King, 1991; Mintzberg, 1983, 1985). This depiction led to the assumption that organizational politics contradicts the common good of the organization and may damage performance at any level (i.e., individual, team, unit, or system). However, in recent years, there has also been interest in the positive side of perceptions of politics. For example, Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer, and Bettenhausen (2008) demonstrated how positive and negative organizational politics represent separate dimensions, rather than two poles of the same continuum, and may occur at the individual, group, or organizational level.

During the 1990s and on into the 2000s, interest in organizational politics has taken a more cognitive direction. A growing number of empirical studies have focused on what people think about political maneuvers in modern worksites, assuming that the reality of politics is better understood via the perceptions of individuals, instead of actual influence tactics. As was suggested by Kacmar and colleagues (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997), perceptions of organizational politics represent the degree to which respondents view their work environment as political in nature, promoting the self-interests of others, and thereby unjust and unfair from the individual's point of view.

These studies proposed a scale for the measurement of political perceptions, called the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS). Currently, the cognitive perspective is the dominant approach in the study of organizational politics and has led to an increase in the number of empirical studies on the effect of organizational politics on employees' attitudes, behavior, and resulting performance in the workplace. The relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is important because it has both theoretical and practical implications. It can potentially help us better understand the meaning of organizational conflict, power, and influence tactics and posit hypotheses regarding their meaning for micro- and macro-level organizational outcomes. Furthermore, it can point to practical tools for handling workplace politics and minimizing its negative effects on members, teams, and the organization as a whole (Silvester, 2008).

### Organizational Politics and Job Outcomes

Power, influence, and politics have at least some effect on every member of an organization, and thus on the entire organizational unit. Based on equity

theory (Adams, 1965) and on the idea of social exchange and social reciprocity (Blau, 1964), the motivation to perform better and the development of positive employee attitudes and behaviors depend on the display of similar positive attitudes and behaviors by other members of the organization (peers, supervisors, management, and the organization as a whole). Therefore, many scholars have argued that the relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes is an important one that deserves careful and thorough investigation (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 2002; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Zhou & Ferris, 1995) and one that has the potential to enhance our understanding of multiple aspects of performance.

From different viewpoints, several studies have tested POPs in relation to a handful of job outcome-related variables (e.g., Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewé, & Johnson, 2003; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006). From these studies, empirical evidence has accumulated, focusing mainly on the negative effect of organizational politics on job satisfaction (e.g., Ferris et al., 1996; Zhou & Ferris, 1995), organizational commitment (e.g., Randall, Cropanzano, Borman, & Birjulin, 1999; Vigoda, 2000), job stress and strain, and job burnout (Kacmar et al., 1999; Valle & Perrewé, 2000). Nonetheless, most studies have examined the possibility of a direct relationship between POPs and work outcomes (i.e., attitudes, behaviors, general performance). Therefore, more empirical studies are needed to support the presence of indirect (moderated or mediated) effects.

Those studies that have tested indirect POPs/job-outcomes relationships have begun to yield encouraging findings. For example, Zivnuska, Kacmar, Witt, Carlson, and Bratton (2004) found that “the interaction of organizational politics and impression management explained a significant incremental amount of variance in supervisor ratings of employee performance” (p. 627). More recently, Harris, Andrews, and Kacmar (2007) found that distributive and procedural justice moderated the POPs–performance relationship.

The negative effects of POPs on job satisfaction and the positive effects of POPs on turnover intentions are weaker when both forms of justice are high. The findings of these researchers followed an early study of Byrne (2005), who suggested fairness as a good moderator of several relationships: POPs–turnover intentions, POPs–formal performance, and POPs–organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Generally speaking, perceiving the organizational environment as fair reduced the negative, covert effect of POPs on job attitudes and job performance.

Finally, Poon (2004, 2006) examined two moderating models and found several meaningful indirect effects. First, intention to quit and job stress resulting from POPs were higher among employees who felt they had little control, as compared to those who felt they had a high level of control. Second, POPs mediated the relationship between trust in supervisors and

helping coworkers. Trust leads to helping behavior in situations in which POPs are low, but has no effect on helping behavior when POPs are high.

It is interesting to note that a majority of the aforementioned studies refer to social context variables (e.g., impression management, fairness, justice, trust) as meaningful in the POPs–outcomes/performance relationship. Hence, in light of these studies, and based on the growing centrality of social constructs in modern organizations, we believe that another, tangible, moderating relationship of the POPs–outcomes/performance relationship may be connected to trust and social support in the workplace.

#### Trust and Social Support: Its Moderating Effect on the POPs/Job-Outcomes Relationship

Trust in coworkers and social support in the workplace are frequently discussed as part of the more general concepts of social structures, social networks, and social capital. *Corporate social capital* is any element of the corporate social structure that brings about positive outcomes (Coleman, 1988, 1994). It includes any means of corporate control embedded in social relations, thus assisting an organization in maximizing its internal assets and resources. *Excess profit* or *economic rent*, which is an outcome of the operation of corporate social capital, is defined as “any advantage or surplus created by nature or social structure over a certain period of time” (Sorensen, 1996, p. 134). *Corporate advantage* may be explained, then, by the differential capacity of organizations to create, promote, and take advantage of corporate social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Sorensen, 2000).

The literature on trust, social support, and general organizational social capital has stressed the role of weak ties and sparse social networks in determining organizational outcomes (Burt, 1992). Burt (1983, 1992) and Talmud (1992, 1994) found that organizations using structural holes (Sorensen, 1996)—spreading their ties with unconnected market segments—are more profitable than are those connecting to redundant market areas (Sorensen, 1996). In contrast, other studies on social support and organizational social capital have found that strong ties among team members and dense networks have a significant impact on the creation of opportunities.

New and sensitive business information and opportunities are enhanced through cohesive contacts (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Gilad, Kaish, & Ronen, 1989). Moreover, Krackhardt (1992), Podolny (1994), and Gabbay (1997) showed the importance of closed intra-organization and extra-organization networks for managing organizational uncertainty. It seems, accordingly, that there is no such thing as a universal optimal network structure (dense or sparse). Instead, many social relationships should be interpreted based on the

specific context of trust among coworkers and the overall social support provided in the group (Coleman, 1994).

Furthermore, the effect of strong ties among team members seems to be a conditional one. Burt (1992) and Han (1992) revealed that, contrary to the logic behind the theories of resource dependence and structural holes, those American organizations that depend heavily on the government survive at higher rates. Additionally, Israeli organizations that are locked in through political connections are more profitable (Talmud, 1992) and more stable over time (Talmud & Mesch, 1997). In uncertain conditions, or in situations in which identity and role expectations are important for performance, embedding economic transactions in strong relations or constructing economic deals in terms of strong ties among team members could serve as a prescription for survival (Dore, 1983; Jones et al., 1997; Podolny, 1993, 1994, 2001; Podolny & Castellucci, 1999). Other studies have found positive relationships between social structures and employees' outcomes (e.g., House, 1981; Leana & Van Buren, 1999; Pierce et al., 1990). A majority of these studies have argued that stronger ties among team members, increased social support and reciprocity among organizational members, and a higher level of mutual trust are solid, positive predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, none of these studies has made a strong argument for an interactive relationship between the social environment and workplace politics in their effect on job outcomes.

As suggested earlier, a literature review reveals that both politics and social factors have previously demonstrated their independent effect on job outcomes. However, there is still a need to examine their integrative effect on job outcomes. From an intra-organizational perspective, it is not clear yet what the role, if any, is of the social environment in the POPs–outcomes relationship. Cropanzano, Kacmar, and Bozeman (1995) noted that the social setting of the workplace is meaningful in this context and that the social climate and social support provided by team members may have an effect on job attitudes and performance stemming from politics. Randall et al. (1999) focused on the relationship between POPs and organizational support in their effect on job attitudes and on formal and informal job performance (i.e., OCB).

The theoretical framework suggested by Ferris et al. (2002) mentions these relationships, developing them theoretically based on social exchange arguments—that is, leader–member exchange (LMX) theory—but not testing them with a field study. Moreover, according to the rationale presented in Ferris et al.'s revised model for POPs, trust is merely an outcome of perceptions of organizational politics. Finally, the researchers omitted social support from their model. More recently, Hochwarter et al. (2003) found that perceived organizational support (POS) was a good mediator between

perceptions of organizational politics and a set of job outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, tension, and job performance. However, constructing a more straightforward model of the interactions among social structures, social networks, and social relations may help clarify the nexus between politics and job outcomes.

In light of the aforementioned studies, we question conventional wisdom about the direct POPs/job-outcomes relationship, suggesting that social factors of trust and social support moderate it in a unique way. The general model for this relationship is suggested in Figure 1 and is rooted in the theory of fairness, equity, and justice in organizations and its relationship with organizational politics (Adams, 1965; Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Cropanzano et al., 1995). In fact, both social structures and POPs provide the basis for employees' perceptions of fairness and equity in organizations.

The idea that politics and fairness are related has already been noted by Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) and has been used extensively in later studies (Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006). According to this approach, decisions motivated by self-interests or political considerations that do not take into consideration the collective goals of the work unit or the organization as a whole tend to be negatively viewed by employees. Furthermore, employees see such decisions as reflecting a greater tendency toward injustice, inequity, and bias in resource distribution.

In addition, studies have indicated that social support and social structures are related to fairness and equity in organizations and in communities (Benabou, 1996; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Walker, Kogut, & Shan, 1997). These cumulative findings are by no means trivial, as there is strong evidence for the power of social factors (e.g., supportive environment, network cohe-

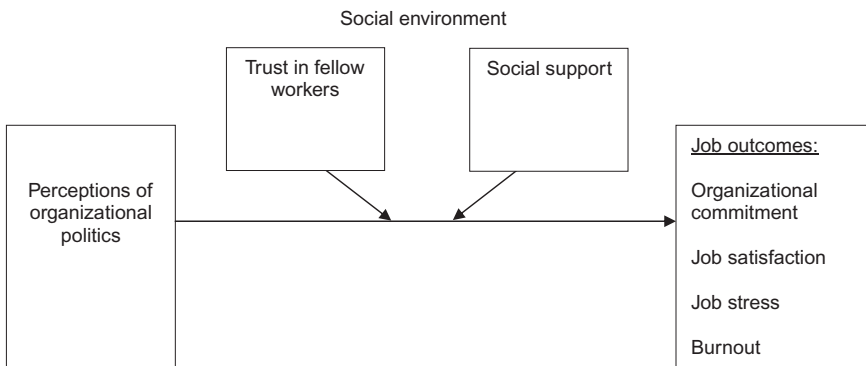


Figure 1. Trust and social support moderate the relationship between organizational politics and job outcomes.

siveness, social capital) in supporting the organizational network over time (Walker et al., 1997). Similarly, Cropanzano, Prehar, and Chen (2002) pointed to social exchange theory as a possible explanation for justice and fairness in organizations, thereby indicating the usefulness of social exchange variables (i.e., trust, social support, social reciprocity, helping behavior) in understanding workplace politics. Hence, it is possible that employees tend to view the work sphere as more fair and just in cases in which social ties can support their interests and ambitions. Individuals with accumulated social ties may feel confident that they have a shield against the tyranny or domination of influential others who may be involved in power games and in organizational politics. We argue, therefore, that employees' sense of fairness and equity may be derived from team contacts, intensive social connections, and strong social networks or social capital. Similarly, it can also lead to changes in job attitudes and work outcomes.

As Figure 1 suggests, another argument for the potential moderating effect may be cognitive theory of the social construction of reality (Lewin, 1936). Strong social systems are largely a result of employees' social contacts with peers and coworkers and the trust that is built up over time among them. It reflects, moreover, employees' investment of energy and resources in creating social contacts and building trustworthy ties. Similarly, POPs reflect a perceptual dimension of the quality of the task environment, some of which is determined by social ties and by the robustness of social safety nets. This perception may be dependent, in turn, on social assets accumulated in the workplace over time, and on the general and positive match between individuals and organizations (i.e., individual-organizational fit; see Bretz & Judge, 1994). Thus, the resulting job attitudes and work outcomes may be merely a subsequent outcome that has been previously shaped by social support, trust, and team relationships.

Finally, social support may be regarded as an individual-level asset (Burt, 1992; Leana & Van Buren, 1999; Lin, 2001). At the individual level, social relationships are not equally distributed. Some employees have more advantageous relationships than do others, and it is possible that the direct, primary benefits accrued from those contacts are greater (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). Those employees with stronger and more heterogeneous social ties are more likely to learn about new opportunities for advancement, promotion, and alternatives for self-fulfillment in the workplace (Burt, 1992; Hansen, 1999; Podolny & Castellucci, 1999). They are better aware of the risks and challenges in the work environment, developing strategies for coping and advancing within the organization. In cases in which organizational politics dominate organizational life, those employees who have built up high levels of mutual trust, have confidence in others, and have established multiple ties with peers and managers will more easily weather stormy times.

Unlike employees with few social ties, employees with many and varied social connections may feel that the organization offers them fair opportunities for advancement, promotion, or other benefits. Therefore, their perceptions about the fairness and equity of the environment are expected to be more positive than those of individuals who lack such solid social networks. Indeed, the latter may react more negatively to high levels of organizational politics than those employees who are protected (physically, cognitively, and emotionally) by strong social circles and rich social capital. Therefore, we suggest three major hypotheses considering the direct and indirect role of trust and social support in the POPs/work-outcomes relationship:

*Hypothesis 1.* Perceptions of organizational politics will be negatively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and positively related to job stress and job burnout.

*Hypothesis 2.* Trust in fellow workers and social support will be positively related to job outcomes and negatively related to POPs.

*Hypothesis 3.* Trust in fellow workers and social support will moderate the relationship between POPs and job outcomes.

## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

A survey was used to collect data in a large public university located in the north of Israel. The questionnaire was administered in Hebrew. All measures were translated from English, using a standard translation/back-translation procedure.

Between May and August 2006, the survey was administered among all faculty members throughout the university's various departments and schools (we excluded adjunct faculty members and those who were away on sabbatical or leave during the time of the survey). To increase the response rate, we made an effort to use a direct distribution and return method. However, in order to maintain full anonymity of the respondents, we also made extensive use of the internal university mail system to distribute and collect data. In the final analysis, 142 usable questionnaires were received, from a total of 355 that were distributed (return rate = 40.0%). In accordance with Baruch (1999) and Roth and BeVier (1998), this ratio is acceptable for mail surveys.

Of the respondents, 64.9% were men, their average age was 51.6 years ( $SD = 9.0$ ), 89.1% were married, their average tenure at the university was

162 months, and 95.5% were Jews. A breakdown by rank shows that 21.8% held the rank of lecturers (without tenure), 30.8% were senior lecturers, 23.3% were associate professors, and 24.1% were full professors.

### *Measures*

*Perceptions of organizational politics (POPs).* *Perceptions of organizational politics* has been defined by Ferris et al. (1989) as the degree to which respondents view their work environment as political and, therefore, as unjust and unfair. Kacmar and Ferris (1991) suggested the first version of the scale with 40 items, which was re-examined by Kacmar and Carlson (1997), who proposed a more parsimonious 12-item scale. This latter scale has become the most accepted measure of POPS.

We adjusted Kacmar and Carlson's (1997) scale slightly to fit the organizational environment of a public research university. The full list of items for this measure appears in the Appendix. The items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Scale reliability was .89.

### *Social Relations*

Based on Leana and Van Buren (1999), we used two major factors—trust and social support—to denote social relationships in the organization. These factors are assets that can “benefit both the organization (e.g., creating value for shareholders) and its members (e.g., enhancing employee skills)” (p. 538).

*Trust.* Dirks and Ferrin (2002) defined *trust* as a psychological state that provides a representation of how individuals understand their relationship with another party in situations that involve risk or vulnerability. Specifically, trust affects assessments of future behavior for interdependent parties. Trust also influences how actions and motives in the past are perceived and interpreted (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Based on Cumming and Bromiley's (1996) Organizational Trust Inventory (OTI), we define *trust* as comprised of proper conduct, honesty, benevolence, goodwill, and integrity in negotiation, even in the face of vulnerability. Nyhan and Marlowe (1997) described a 12-item scale measuring this variable, which represents an individual's level of trust in his or her supervisor and in his or her work organization as a whole. The scale was tested in seven different organizations, with a total sample size of 779 individuals.

Measures of reliability, validity, and factor analyses were presented to demonstrate that the instrument was psychometrically adequate and stable.

A nine-item scale was used, based on this study. Sample items are “I think that university professors tell the truth in formal meetings”; “In my view, the university management is trustworthy and fulfills its duty towards the academic staff and is trustworthy”; “You can trust the professors in this university”; and “I feel that the professors in this university tell the truth to each other.” Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Scale reliability was .91.

*Social support.* *Social support* refers to expressions of sympathy or empathy for an individual experiencing distress and can be a powerful buffer against burnout (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001). Pierce et al. (1990) defined social support as an interpersonal transaction perceived as or intended to ease coping with everyday life, especially under stressful situations. House (1981) identified four types of social support: socio-emotional, cognitive, appraisal, and tangible/instrumental.

Based on this approach, we developed a four-item scale, which is appropriate for a university setting, measuring these four types of social support. Sample items are “I enjoy listening to and receiving support from other faculty members in the university when I turn to them to ask for help,” and “I receive professional and research support from faculty members in the university.” Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Scale reliability was .69.

### *Job Outcomes*

*Job satisfaction.* We relied on a measure of job satisfaction that was developed by Schriesheim and Tsui (1980). Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they are with five aspects of their job: current job, coworkers, current salary, opportunities for promotion, and work in general. We omitted a sixth item about satisfaction with supervisors that was originally included in Schriesheim and Tsui’s scale because of its lack of relevance for university professors. Scale items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very unsatisfied*) to 7 (*very satisfied*). Scale reliability was .81.

*Organizational commitment.* This variable was measured with the most commonly used measure of organizational commitment, the attitudinal Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), which was introduced by Porter and Smith (1970). The scale, which is also known as the Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) measure, is the most viable measure of affective commitment and has enjoyed widespread acceptance and use. In its shortened nine-item version, the measure reflects the three dimensions of the definition of commitment suggested by Porter et al.: (a) desire to retain membership in the organization; (b) belief in and acceptance of the values

and goals of the organization; and (c) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization. Sample items include “I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization”; “I really care about the fate of this organization”; “I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for the organization”; and “For me, this is the best of all possible organizations to work for.” Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Scale reliability was .87.

*Job stress.* House and Rizzo (1972) constructed a scale measuring “the existence of tensions and pressures growing out of job requirements, including the possible outcomes in terms of feelings or physical symptoms” (p. 481). The original scale was 17 items and referred to three types of tension–stress factors: job-induced tension (JIT), somatic tension (ST), and general fatigue and uneasiness (GFU). For reasons of parsimony, we used only four items, which, however, are representative of the three factors: (a) “I work under a great deal of tension” (JIT); (b) “If I had a different job, my health would probably improve” (JIT); (c) “I get irritated or annoyed over the way things are going here” (ST); and (d) “I seem to tire quickly” (GFU). Respondents were asked to report the degree to which they agree with the items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A higher score indicates a higher level of job stress and strain. Scale reliability was .75.

*Job burnout.* Burnout is a psychological response to chronic stressors and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduction in personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). An important distinguishing feature of burnout is the general feeling of hopelessness experienced by the individual (Zellars, Perrewé, & Hochwarter, 1999). Burnout was measured using a six-item scale that was taken from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Sample items are “I feel emotionally drained by my work”; “I feel used up at the end of the workday”; and “Working with people all day is really a strain for me.” Respondents were asked to report the degree to which they agree with the items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect a higher level of burnout. Scale reliability was .88.

### *Data Analysis*

We used moderated hierarchical regression analysis, with interaction effects, to examine the direct and indirect relationships between the independent variables and job outcomes. In accordance with conventional requirements for testing interaction effects, all relevant variables were centered. Interaction plots are offered to explore better the nature of the moderating effects. Missing data were handled with a pairwise deletion method.

## Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the sample. As shown, the psychometric properties of the examined variables are reasonable. All variables had fairly normal distributions and acceptable Cronbach's alpha ratios (.69–.91). In addition, most of the intercorrelations held in the expected directions. POPs were negatively related to trust in fellow workers ( $r = -.73, p < .001$ ) and to social support ( $r = -.49, p < .001$ ). POPs were also significantly related to job outcomes (organizational commitment,  $r = -.55, p < .001$ ; job satisfaction,  $r = -.51, p < .001$ ; job stress,  $r = .30, p < .001$ ; job burnout,  $r = .24, p < .01$ ). In addition, job outcomes were positively related with trust and social support, and were negatively related with POPs. These findings provide general support for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Finally, the intercorrelation between trust in fellow workers and social support was .60 ( $p < .001$ ), which attests to the lack of multicollinearity. Another indication of the lack of multicollinearity is different relationships between the demographic variables (i.e., age, gender) and trust and social support. Whereas age and gender were related to social support ( $r = -.24, p < .05$ ; and  $r = .18, p < .05$ , respectively), their relationship with trust in fellow workers was not significant. To verify further the lack of multicollinearity between POPs and trust ( $r = -.73, p < .001$ ), we conducted an exploratory factor analysis of them. The result was two clear factors of POPs and trust, which increases our confidence about the solidity of the measures, their distinctiveness, and the usefulness of the further multivariate analysis.

Tables 2 and 3 summarize the findings of two moderated hierarchical regression analyses in which four types of job outcomes were separately regressed on the independent variables and on each of the moderating variables (Table 2 presents trust in fellow workers, while Table 3 presents social support and reciprocity). We separated the analysis for each of the moderating variables and its interaction with POPs to further ensure a lack of multicollinearity.

As shown in Table 2, POPs had a negative main effect on job satisfaction and on organizational commitment ( $\beta = -.24, p < .05$ ; and  $\beta = -.22, p < .05$ , respectively). Another important main effect is the positive relationship of trust with job satisfaction and with organizational commitment ( $\beta = .40, p < .001$ ; and  $\beta = .44, p < .05$ , respectively). However, this relationship diminished after the third step of the equation with the addition of the interaction effect. Generally speaking, these findings quite strongly support Hypothesis 1 for POPs, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, but not for the stress-related variables. To a lesser extent, they also support the main effect suggested in Hypothesis 2 whereby trust was expected to have a positive relationship with the dependent variables (mainly job satisfaction and

Table 1  
Means and Intercorrelations of Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceptions of organizational politics	4.02	1.12	(.89)							
Social environment										
2. Trust in fellow workers	4.42	1.07	-.73***	(.91)						
3. Social support	4.74	1.00	-.49***	.60***	(.69)					
Job outcomes										
4. Organizational commitment	4.76	1.07	-.55***	.58***	.61***	(.87)				
5. Job satisfaction	5.02	1.14	-.51***	.57***	.55***	.73***	(.81)			
6. Job stress	3.00	1.31	.30***	-.34***	-.23**	-.33***	-.39***	(.75)		
7. Burnout	3.54	1.49	.24**	-.20*	-.20*	-.22**	-.32***	.80***	(.88)	
Demographics										
8. Gender (female)	0.35	0.48	.05	.06	.18*	.29***	.20*	.10	.16	—
9. Age	51.55	9.04	-.03	-.15	-.24*	-.02	.09	-.22*	-.20*	-.04

Note. N = 139–142. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities appear in parentheses.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2  
*Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analysis (Standardized Coefficients) for Relationship Between POPs and Job Outcomes, With Trust as a Moderator*

Variable	Job satisfaction (β)			Organizational commitment (β)			Job stress (β)			Job burnout (β)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<b>Demographics</b>												
1. Age	.10	.18	.16	-.02	.07	.04	-.21*	-.25*	-.22*	-.20*	-.22*	-.20*
2. Gender	.13	.16	.17	.23*	.27**	.28***	.16	.14	.13	.18	.16	.15
<b>Direct effect</b>												
3. POPs	-.04	-.24*			.05	-.22*		-.16	.07		-.19	.02
4. Trust (high/low)		.40***	.08		.44***	.03		-.15	.20		-.06	.26
<b>Moderation</b>												
5. Trust × POPs			.45**			.57***			-.49**			-.44**
R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.18	.24	.05	.24	.34	.07	.12	.19	.07	.11	.17
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.14	.20	.03	.20	.30	.05	.08	.14	.06	.07	.13
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	—	.15	.06	—	.19	.10	—	.05	.07	—	.04	.06
F for R <sup>2</sup>	—	8.55***	7.21**	—	10.94***	13.62***	—	2.29	8.08**	—	1.93	6.53*
F	1.21	4.98***	5.70***	2.69	7.10***	9.19***	3.63*	3.00*	4.21**	3.78*	2.89*	3.76**

Note. N = 139–142. POPs = perceptions of organizational politics.  
 \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Table 3  
*Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analysis (Standardized Coefficients) for Relationship Between POPs and Job Outcomes, With Social Support as a Moderator*

Variable	Job satisfaction (β)			Organizational commitment (β)			Job stress (β)			Job burnout (β)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<b>Demographics</b>												
1. Age	.10	.21*	.18*	-.03	.07	.05	-.21*	-.24*	-.21*	-.19*	-.24*	-.22*
2. Gender	.13	.07	.13	.23*	.18*	.22*	.16	.17	.10	.18	.20	.14
<b>Direct effect</b>												
3. POPs		-.10	-.39**		-.01	-.20		-.14	.21		-.16	.08
4. SS (high/low)		.47***	.11		.39***	.15		-.14	.30		-.16	.15
<b>Moderation</b>												
5. SS × POPs			.55**			.36*			-.66***			-.47*
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.23	.30	.05	.19	.22	.07	.11	.22	.07	.13	.18
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.20	.27	.03	.16	.18	.05	.07	.18	.05	.09	.14
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	—	.21	.07	—	.14	.03	—	.04	.11	—	.06	.05
F for R <sup>2</sup>	-1.18	12.51***	9.67**	—	7.91***	3.80*	—	2.10	12.68***	—	2.99*	6.15**
F		6.99***	8.04***	2.70	5.50***	5.29***	3.57*	2.87*	5.12***	3.71*	3.43*	4.12**

Note. N = 139-142. POPs = perceptions of organizational politics; SS = social support.  
 \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

organizational commitment). The most prominent finding in this equation is the consistent and significant side effect of trust on the relationship between POPs and each of the work-outcomes indicators. Interaction effects were as follows: job satisfaction,  $\beta = .45$ ,  $p < .01$ ; organizational commitment,  $\beta = .57$ ,  $p < .001$ ; job stress,  $\beta = -.49$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and job burnout,  $\beta = -.44$ ,  $p < .01$ . The added explained variance for the interaction effects ranged from between 6% and 7% for job satisfaction, job stress, and job burnout to 10% for organizational commitment. These findings strongly support Hypothesis 3 for variable trust in fellow workers.

According to Table 3, POPs had a negative main effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.39$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not on any of the other dependent variables. This finding is in line with Hypothesis 1 for these variables. Another main effect is the positive relationship of social support and reciprocity with job satisfaction and with organizational commitment ( $\beta = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and  $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively). These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 2 for these variables. However, this relationship diminished after the third step of the equation with the addition of the interaction effect. Thus, we conclude that there is only partial and limited support for Hypothesis 2.

As with the analyses of the previous regression equation, the most prominent finding in the current equation is the consistent and significant side effect of social support and reciprocity on the relationship between POPs and each of the outcome indicators. Interaction effects were as follows: job satisfaction,  $\beta = .55$ ,  $p < .01$ ; organizational commitment,  $\beta = .36$ ,  $p < .05$ ; job stress,  $\beta = -.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and job burnout,  $\beta = -.47$ ,  $p < .05$ . The added explained variance for the interaction effects ranged between 3% and 5% for organizational commitment and job burnout to between 7% and 11% for job satisfaction and job stress. These findings strongly support Hypothesis 3 for the variable of social support and reciprocity.

Finally, Figures 2 through 9 present the plots of the interaction effects. According to these plots, trust and social support are good mediators of the POPs/job-outcomes relationship. Employees with high levels of trust in their fellow workers and strong social support react more positively to organizational politics than do employees who report low levels of trust and weak social support. Thus, the most negative effects of POPs would be on employees who do not enjoy a broad safety network of social support, mutual trust with coworkers, and a general foundation of solid social capital. Their reactions—in terms of reduced job satisfaction, compromised organizational commitment, and high levels of job stress and burnout—will be significantly stronger than others who have accumulated social assets (e.g., trust in coworkers), gained the social support of their peers, and cultivated generally healthy, reciprocal relations with others (e.g., values, needs, interests). A surprising finding, however, is the positive relationship that emerged between

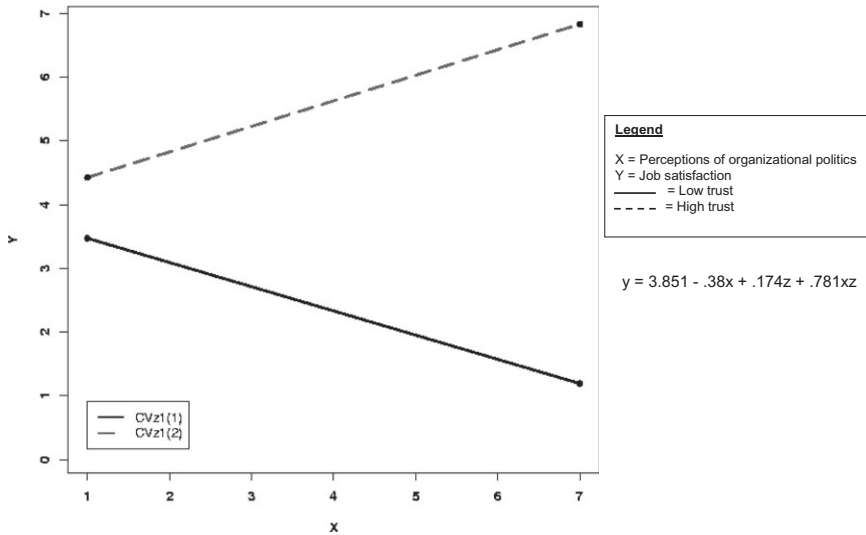


Figure 2. Moderating effect of trust on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job satisfaction.

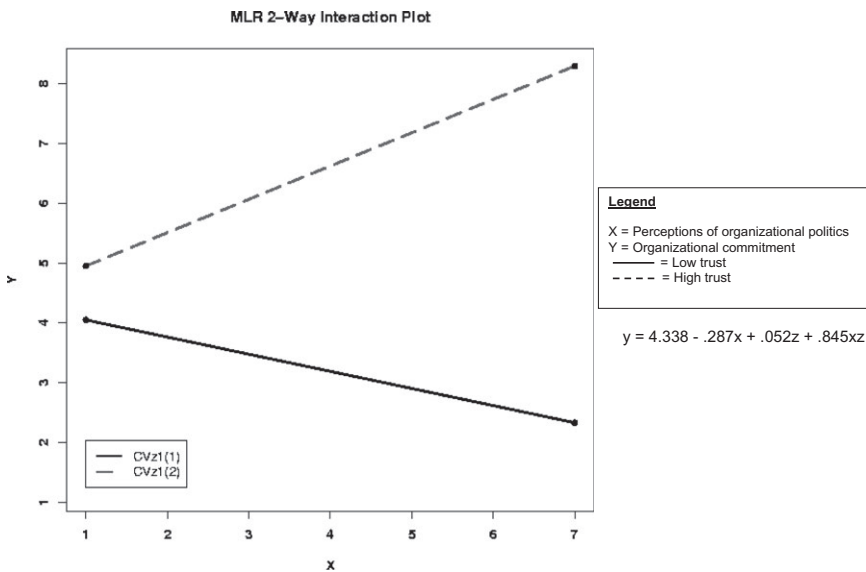


Figure 3. Moderating effect of trust on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and organizational commitment.

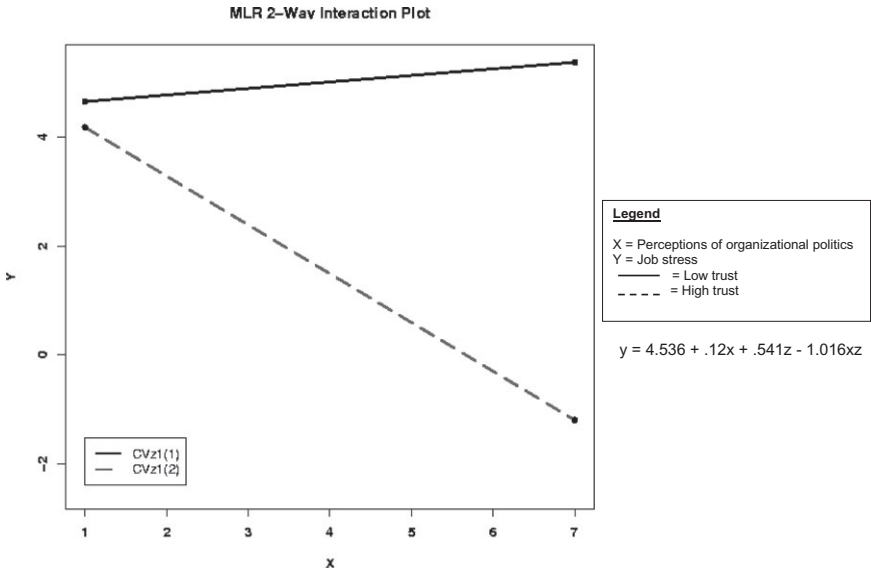


Figure 4. Moderating effect of trust on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job stress.

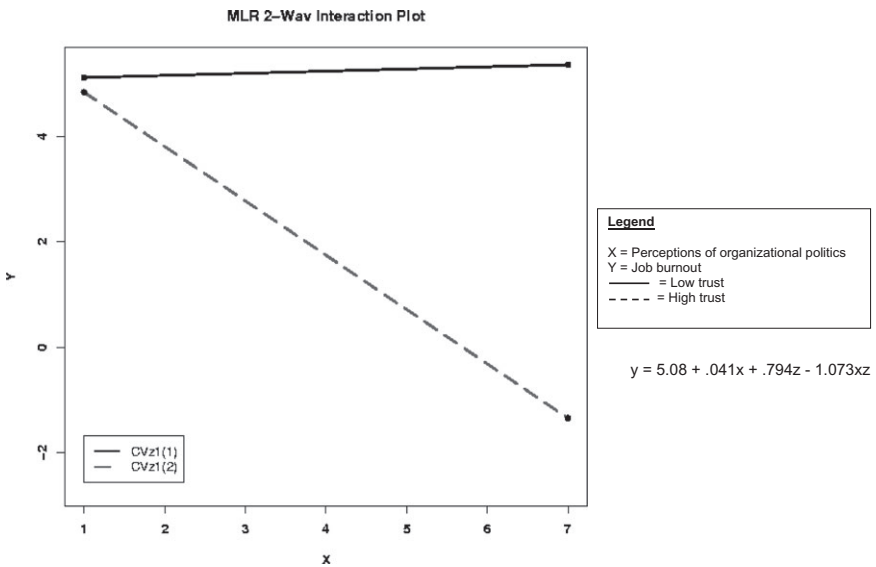


Figure 5. Moderating effect of trust on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job burnout.

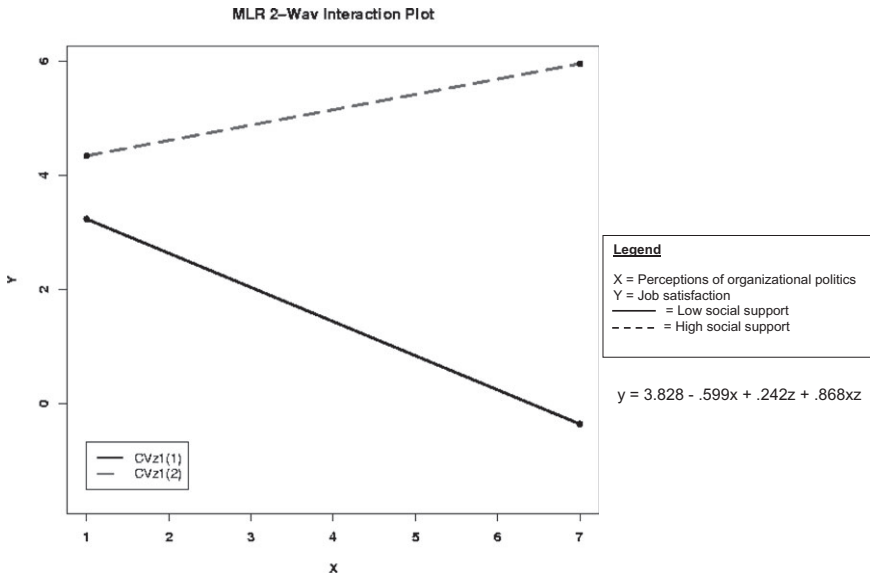


Figure 6. Moderating effect of social support on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job satisfaction.

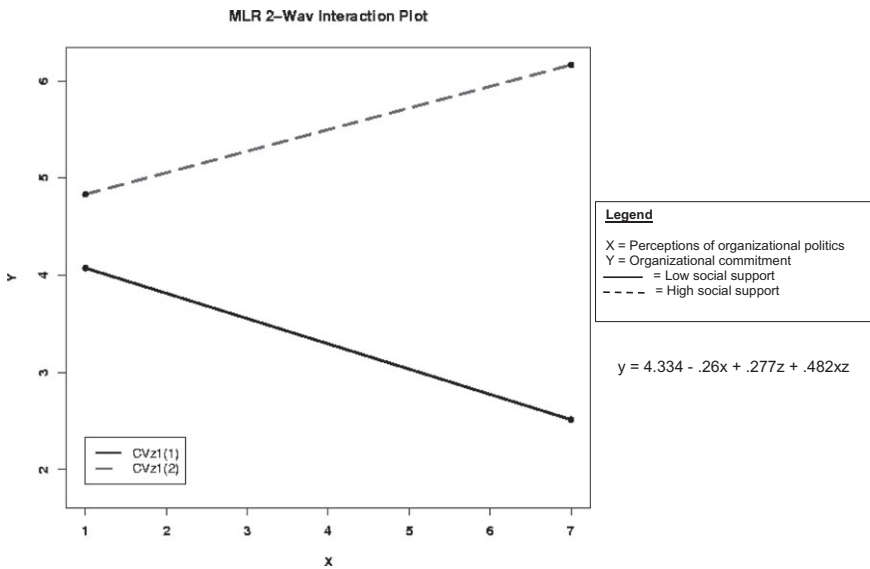


Figure 7. Moderating effect of social support on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and organizational commitment.

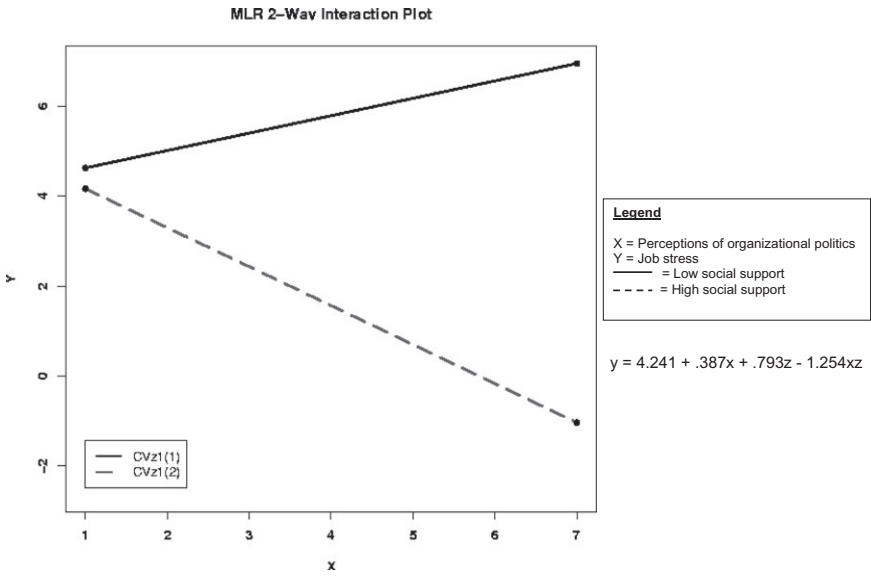


Figure 8. Moderating effect of social support on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job stress.

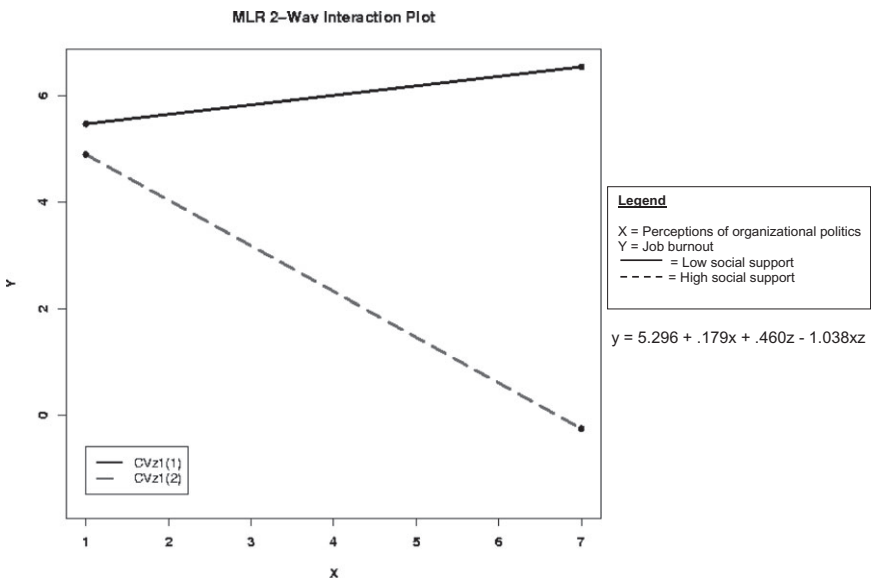


Figure 9. Moderating effect of social support on the relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job burnout.

POPs and job outcomes under high levels of trust and social support. Potential explanations for all the findings are suggested in the final section of this paper.

### Discussion

Byrne (2005) argued that because workplace politics are considered necessary for the normal functioning of any organization, "buffering their negative effects becomes critical" (p. 176). The major goal of the present study was to address this challenge by testing the moderating effect of trust and social support on the relationship between organizational politics and job outcomes. The findings demonstrate quite strongly that this moderation effect is meaningful and that employees with high levels of trust in their fellow workers and social support have better coping mechanisms to deal with the aftermath of POPs. These findings have theoretical and practical implications that are worthy of further elaboration.

First, the interaction effects results deserve further discussion. Some of the findings are not trivial. For example, Figure 2 suggests that respondents with a low level of trust reported high levels of job satisfaction when there is limited perception of politics. However, respondents with high levels of trust reported greater job satisfaction when perceptions of politics are high. In other words, the expected negative relationship between POPs and job satisfaction worked only for respondents expressing a low level of trust, but became positive for respondents with high levels of trust. Despite the fact that this finding is in line with our hypotheses for the low-trust group, it is quite surprising for the high-trust category. Our explanation of this finding is based on the notion that trust (or social support) and POPs are directed at different objects. Trust and social support, as measured in this study, pertain more to fellow workers, while the POPs scale relates more to the organization as a whole, especially its management, its decision-making processes, and the resulting strategies and policies of the organization. It is thus possible that when trust (in fellow workers) or social support is high, perceptions of politics (directed at the organization) increases dependence on fellow workers, and trust in colleagues becomes more important than POPs in determining job satisfaction, organizational commitment, stress, and burnout.

A study by Cohen and McKay (1983) is in line with our interpretation. It showed the conditional buffering of social support only for those experiencing stressful events because such support provides a coping mechanism through interpersonal relations. Therefore, for those individuals who have a high level of trust in their fellow workers, job outcomes do not degrade

in the face of high levels of POPs. On the contrary, the trust in and social support of colleagues act as compensatory factors, allowing the quality of job outcomes to remain unchanged or even improve despite a rise in the level of POPs. For those with higher levels of trust and social support, a nonpolitical environment does not trigger a process of social compensation, and the levels of job outcomes remain at their original (or somewhat lower) levels. For those who have low levels of trust and little feeling of social support, the compensation mechanism is not relevant. Our findings thus support the powerful effect of social networks that work as a buffer and a compensation mechanism in the face of high perceptions of politics in organizations.

The positive changes in job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as the lower levels of stress and burnout, are a result of the coping and compensation mechanisms of social relations that buffer the detrimental outcomes of organizational politics. The same rationale holds for the link between social support and the other dependent variables (i.e., organizational commitment, job stress, job burnout). Evidence for this logic can be found in the interactive results that are quite similar for both trust in fellow workers and social support (Figures 2–5 vs. Figures 6–9).

Furthermore, this explanation is particularly relevant for the sample used in the present study. In loosely organized groups (e.g., universities), the issue that matters most to staff members vis-à-vis management is the promotions process. Under such circumstances, interdependence, social support, and trust in one's fellow workers are more relevant than are POPs in determining general job satisfaction. Researchers have long noted the special differentiation of social networks in academia (Blau, 1973; Friedkin, 1983, 1998). Moreover, Krackhardt (1992) has already shown the importance of strong ties among fellow workers facing critical changes in their organization, and the discrepancy between the formal workflow networks and the friendship and informal advice network. Previous studies are also in line with our interpretation.

The present study makes several additional theoretical contributions. First, it adds to current knowledge regarding organizational politics and facilitates a more accurate understanding of its effects on job outcomes. In contrast to conventional wisdom in this field, this study supports the notion that perceptions of politics have a more complex relationship with job outcomes, a relationship that may be different for various types of employees. Not every employee will react to POPs the same way his or her colleagues will, and the social arsenal or social skills of the individual are a good buffer against the potentially negative aftermaths of POPs, those that are well documented in previous empirical studies. Our findings, therefore, are much in line with some theoretical notions that were suggested by Ferris et al.

(2002) and with several other studies emphasizing the indirect nature of the POPS–outcomes relationship (e.g., Byrne, 2005; Harris et al., 2007; Hochwarter et al., 2003; Poon, 2004, 2006; Zivnuska et al., 2004).

Second, the centrality of the social environment in shaping organizational life is reconfirmed. Our empirical examination of trust in fellow workers and social support suggests that these two facets of the social network are essential for helping employees cope with a political environment. Similarly, and as demonstrated in the literature review, theories regarding social relations, social networks, and social capital highlight their contribution to the understanding of organizational outcomes and job performance. Yet, unlike most other models (with the exception of Burt, 1997), the present paper examined the impact of organizational social constructs, not as a main effect variable, but, rather, as a moderating device, facilitating employees in their struggle with powerful others and within a politically oriented work environment (Silvester, 2008). Future studies should extend this investigative approach in order to expand our understanding of the buffering and perhaps compensatory role of social support, trust, and possibly overall social capital in the process of organizational development.

A third and final theoretical contribution of this study is to provide an additional dimension for the fit between the individual and the workplace. According to the theory of person–environment–organization fit (POF; e.g., Bretz & Judge, 1994; Chatman, 1989), the match between an individual and the organization's social system has a strong impact on job attitudes and work outcomes at both the individual and organizational levels. Individuals' social capital depends on their personality, social skills, and motivation to construct and maintain social networks (see Kalish & Robins, 2006). However, the specific willingness and skills of an individual may not be enough to build trust or social support. These qualities must be matched by the willingness and skills of colleagues, peers, and other organizational members to engage in activities designed to build a healthy social atmosphere. Only by creating such a match can an effective social network be built and maintained. Though we have not specifically measured POF, we strongly believe that our study provides additional support for this perspective by demonstrating its potentially moderating effect on the politics–outcomes relationship. This contribution may also extend to the general domain of conflict in organizations by suggesting that the negative effects of conflicts and power struggles in the workplace can be moderated and reduced by strengthening social ties and improving the fit between employees and the organization.

It is also worth noting that there is a strong connection between the social environment, social capital, intellectual capital, and sustained competitive advantage (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Therefore, the importance of

examining organizational social constructs, POPs, and job outcomes cannot be overstated. Understanding the connection among them may be very important for improving employment practices, human resources management, and the development and transfer of tacit knowledge. This insight is particularly pertinent for those organizations characterized by informal and nonstandard practices, such as knowledge workers and those employed in risky, high-tech environments (Darr & Talmud, 2003). Our sample was drawn from such an organization, and the results should be interpreted in light of this fact. Thus, future studies are needed to determine whether our findings can be generalized to other work environments. Moreover, those who are interested in the meaning of social constructs (e.g., trust, social support) for modern worksites should consider the relevance of POPs to the construction and maintenance of organizational networks, productive social relations, and individual social capital.

Additionally, other, more minor findings should be noted. Age and gender were correlated with several of the model's variables. More specifically, women enjoyed stronger social support than did men. They also exhibited higher levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction than did men. Younger employees enjoyed more social support, perhaps because of short-term social contacts. Similarly, they reported higher levels of job stress and burnout than did veteran employees. We feel that this finding is in line with the specific characteristics of our sample, which places the heaviest job load and the most pressure on faculty members in the early stages of their professional employment. Surely, the race for scientific achievements, the competition for tenure, and the need to publish and secure a position in the academic community take their toll. The social support that young individuals receive may work for them in the long run, but the cost is high levels of stress and burnout, both of which tend to diminish over time. Those who use their personal and social resources may, in the long run, experience much lower levels of stress and burnout. Those who know how to turn their social support into a useful buffering and compensation device may become more successful scholars than those who use their social networks less effectively or do not use them at all.

Several limitations of this study should also be mentioned. First, this study was performed using a unique single case study of faculty members from a research university. The uniqueness of the sample may be an advantage (e.g., enriching our current knowledge about organizational politics with the views of professors whose working world is much different from that of others who work in more routine vocations), but it also limits our ability to make comparisons. The job of faculty members is relatively autonomous. They operate in a loose structure, and their reference groups are both internal and external to the organization. Thus, they operate in a climate that is quite

different from that of typical work organizations. Further examination of this moderating link, therefore, should be performed in other organizations and environments.

Second, in terms of our data analysis, it may be argued that our model should be tested using other algorithms for moderation in the structural equation modeling (SEM) device (e.g., AMOS, MPlus). However, the relatively small sample size (< 200 individuals) and the need to examine the moderation effects with SEM for different intragroups in our sample prevented us from following this path. We preferred taking the more solid approach of using conventional interactive tests with hierarchical regressions. However, we acknowledge the need for future studies to retest our model with SEM using larger samples.

Third, additional components of the social environment should be tested against rival hypotheses, especially models of structural holes (e.g., Burt, 1992) and personality attributes (e.g., self-monitoring, political skills), which have been deemed to be quite relevant in the creation of an individual's social network (Blickle, Meurs et al., 2008; Blickle, Schneider, Perrewé, Blass, & Ferris, 2008; Blickle & Witzki, 2008; Kalish & Robins, 2006). Finally, the study suffers from a single-source and common-method bias. We tried to deal with these problems when ensuring lack of multicollinearity, as described in the previous sections. However, future studies should replicate ours using additional sources, especially for measuring work outcomes at the individual, team, and organizational levels. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, we believe that the present study adds to our knowledge about perceptions of politics, trust, and social support in organizations; as well as the potential moderating effect that social environments and social structures have on the well-being, productivity, and job outcomes of employees.

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## Appendix

*Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale Used in the Present Study*

1. Favoritism, rather than merit, determines who gets ahead in this university.
2. There is no place for yes-men in this university: Good ideas are desired, even when it means disagreeing with superiors. (R)
3. Faculty members are encouraged to speak out frankly, even when they are critical of well-established ideas. (R)
4. There has always been an influential group of faculty members in this university that no one ever crosses.
5. Faculty members here usually don't speak up for fear of retaliation by others.
6. Rewards come only to those faculty members who work hard in this university. (R)
7. Promotions in this university generally go to top performers. (R)
8. Faculty members in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down.
9. I have seen changes made in policies of this university that only serve the purposes of a few faculty members, not the faculty or the university.
10. There is a group of faculty members in this university who always get things their way because no one wants to challenge them.
11. I can't remember when a person received a pay increase or a promotion that was inconsistent with the university's published policies. (R)
12. Since I have worked in this university, I have never seen the pay and promotion policies applied politically. (R)

*Note.* R = reverse-scored.