

Influence tactics and perceptions of organizational politics A longitudinal study

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Abstract

This study explores a longitudinal design to address the assumption that influence tactics and perceptions of organizational politics are, in fact, related. Furthermore, this research examines the proposed intermediate linkages and process issues that are involved in this relationship. Influence tactics, which represent actual organizational politics (OP), are argued to be an important predictor of perception(s) of organizational politics (POPS). The research tests whether the relationship between influence tactics and POPS is direct or mediated by met expectations (ME) and person–organization fit (POF). A total of 303 employees and managers in two major Israeli public organizations were surveyed at two points in time. To allow conclusions on causality among research variables, the study applied a longitudinal design where influence tactics were measured at time 1 and POPS, ME, and POF were measured 6 months later. ME was found to mediate the relationship between influence tactics and POPS while no such conclusion could be drawn for POF. Implications of the results are described as directions to future research on influence and politics in organizations. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Organizations politics (OP) is a controversial concept. While there is hardly any doubt that internal politics is a common phenomenon in every organization (e.g. Mintzberg, 1983; Ferris and King, 1991; Pfeffer, 1992; Zhou and Ferris, 1995) very little is known about the nature and boundaries of such politics (Mayes and Allen, 1977; Kipnis et al., 1980; Cropanzano et al., 1997). Two approaches to OP have dominated the literature. The first focuses on employees' influence tactics at work as the best representative of political behavior. One line of research proposes a variety of typologies for influence tactics as well as possible antecedents and consequences of different influence tactics (Burns, 1961; Izraeli, 1975, 1987; Kipnis et al., 1980; Erez and Rim, 1982; Cheng, 1983; Brass, 1984). The second approach is more recent and focuses on employees' subjective *perceptions* of organizational politics rather than on political behavior or influence tactics. As was suggested by Kacmar and Ferris (1991, p. 193–194) and Kacmar and Carlson (1994, p. 3), 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 point of view. These studies proposed a scale for the measurement of political perceptions called the "Perception of Organizational Politics Scale" (POPS). This approach was extensively tested by Ferris, Kacmar, and their colleagues in numerous studies (Ferris et al., 1989, 1991, 1994; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Kacmar and Carlson, 1994).

Most of the relatively few studies on OP have concentrated on employees' perceptions of politics. While some research has discussed and examined actual political behavior, very little has tested the relationship between political behavior and perceptions of politics. This paper argues that actual political behavior, such as employees' influence tactics, is an important component that should be integrated in any conceptual framework of organizational politics. Actual political behavior differs conceptually from perceptions of politics. It is, however, causally related to perceptions, and the nature of this relationship is posited and tested here. This study proposes and tests a conceptual model of the relationship between influence tactics and POPS. The relationship is generally predicted to be mediated by factors representing the congruence between the individual and his/

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her work environment. The model is empirically tested by a longitudinal design, allowing meaningful conclusions on a causal relationship between actual influence tactics and perceptions of politics. This paper offers several important contributions. First, a model relating political behavior to perceptions of politics has not been tested before. Second, while most OP data are based on a cross-sectional design that does not permit any causal conclusions, our longitudinal design does so.

2. Research on influence and politics

2.1. Organizational politics: definition and overview

Research on OP has argued that politics is an important component in the workplace that needs further inquiry and examination (Mayes and Allen, 1977; DuBrin, 1978; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992; Mintzberg, 1983; Drory and Romm, 1990; Parker et al., 1995). Mayes and Allen (1977, p. 675), for example, defined it as the management of influence to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned influence means. Pfeffer (1981, p. 7) defined OP as actions undertaken to acquire, enhance, and use power to obtain preferred outcomes in situations having dissensus on choices. Gray and Ariss (1985, p. 707) suggested that OP consists of intentional acts of influence undertaken by individuals or groups to enhance or protect their self-interest when conflicting courses of action are possible. All these definitions evidently refer to the existence of influence processes on the organizational macro or micro level. This study focuses on intra-organizational influence relationships, which has two main dimensions (Cropanzano et al., 1997), political behavior and perceptions of politics.

The first dimension regards OP as part of a general set of social behaviors used as tools that can contribute to the basic functioning of the organization (Pfeffer, 1981). Accordingly, OP should be investigated through employees' influence tactics that are aimed at different goals, self-focused as well as organizational-focused (Kipnis et al., 1980, p. 440). While several studies were interested in politics and influence tactics in organizations (e.g., French and Raven, 1959; Izraeli, 1975; Schein, 1977; DuBrin, 1978, 1988), Kipnis et al.'s study is of major importance in its theoretical perspective and empirical evidence. Kipnis et al. (1980) view OP as ways in which people at work influence their colleagues, subordinates, and superiors to obtain personal benefits or to satisfy organizational goals. This definition allows a balanced analysis of the phenomenon (Drory, 1993). The main goal of Kipnis et al.'s (1980) study was to identify the range and dimensions of tactics that people use at work, which ultimately were reduced to eight categories: (1) assertiveness, (2) ingratiation, (3) rationality, (4) sanctions, (5) exchange, (6) upward appeal, (7) blocking, and (8) coalitions. These influence tactics show great similarity to

influence tactics investigated in other studies (Erez and Rim, 1982; Erez et al., 1986; Yukl and Tracey, 1992). Note that all the scales used in these studies were based on employees' self-reports of actual influence tactics in their work environment.

The second dimension defines politics as behavior strategically designed to maximize employees' short-term or long-term self-interests (Ferris et al., 1994). This definition was adopted in many studies that tended to treat OP as dysfunctional behavior in organizations (Ferris et al., 1989, 1996; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Drory, 1993; Cropanzano et al., 1997). According to this perspective, OP is self-serving behavior by employees to gain self-interests, advantages, and benefits at the expense of others and sometimes contrary to the interests of the entire organization or work unit. In studies following this approach political behavior is represented by individual's subjective perceptions of politics, not actual politics or influence tactics. Porter (1976), for example, argued that perceptions of organizational politics are important even if they are misperceptions of actual events (Ferris et al., 1996). Gandz and Murray (1980) argued that OP is a state of mind. Ferris et al. (1989) and Zhou and Ferris (1995) noted that this concept views OP as basically a subjective perception, which may or may not reflect objective reality. The notion of perception of OP was extensively researched by Ferris et al. (1989), who developed a theoretical model of a new perspective of OP based on Lewin's (1936) argument that people respond to their perceptions of reality, not to reality. Politics in organizations should similarly be understood in terms of what people think the politics is rather than what it actually is. More recently, Kacmar and Ferris (1991) and Kacmar and Carlson (1994) tried to better conceptualize perceptions of politics by developing a scale called POPS developed to measure people's attitudes to politics at work more accurately.

2.2. Relationship between employees' influence tactics and perceptions of politics

While the above review showed that some work has been done on influence tactics and perceptions of politics, the relationship between the two has not been examined. Cropanzano et al. (1997) argued that "both [approaches] are useful and contribution can be made using either perspective, so long as researchers are clear about their definition." Other studies more specifically stressed the need to examine the relationship between actual political behavior and perceptions of organizational politics. For example, Ferris and Kacmar (1992, p. 94) surmised a strong correspondence between employees' political behavior and perception of politics in the organization since they represent similar phenomena. Ferris et al. (1989) and Kacmar and Carlson (1994) argued that because both factors describe the same organizational environment and culture they should be related. Some support for this relationship was found by Kumar and Ghadially (1989) who revealed that employees'

actual political behavior was related to feelings of alienation and interpersonal mistrust in the workplace.

All the foregoing suggests that the two phenomena, political behavior and perceptions of politics, might be related, but little research has attempted to explore and to test the nature of this relationship. The study reported here attempted to do so, thus to advance our knowledge of OP one step further. We argue that actual political behavior and perceptions of politics are two dimensions constituting an important part of the political sphere at work. They refer to the same organizational climate and thereby are expected to be positively related. An important question is the nature of their relationship. One possibility is that individual's political behaviors may help in formulating perceptions of the work environment, namely political behavior affects perceptions of organizational politics. Another is that individuals' political perceptions may assist in determining actual political behaviors. Accordingly, one's perceptions of politics should affect one's political behavior. We incline towards the first possibility. Below we argue that influence tactics

aim at certain goals for the individual who applies them. One's degree of success is demonstrated in one's met expectations (ME) and perceptions of fit with the organization, and it determines one's perceptions of politics. By this explanation the relationship between actual politics and perception of politics is not direct but mediated by factors that represent fit with the organization, a notion of mediation advanced by Ferris and Kacmar (1992, p. 112–113).

2.3. Model and hypotheses

The research model is presented in Fig. 1. As argued by Ferris et al. (1989), POPS can be affected by several constructs. Our basic argument is that one of these constructs can be the actual political behavior of an employee. Hence, perceptions of politics in the workplace might be determined after the employee has had the chance to be directly involved in political activity and to apply some influence tactics in which he/she has tried to attain essential interests. This political activity, which may also be formed

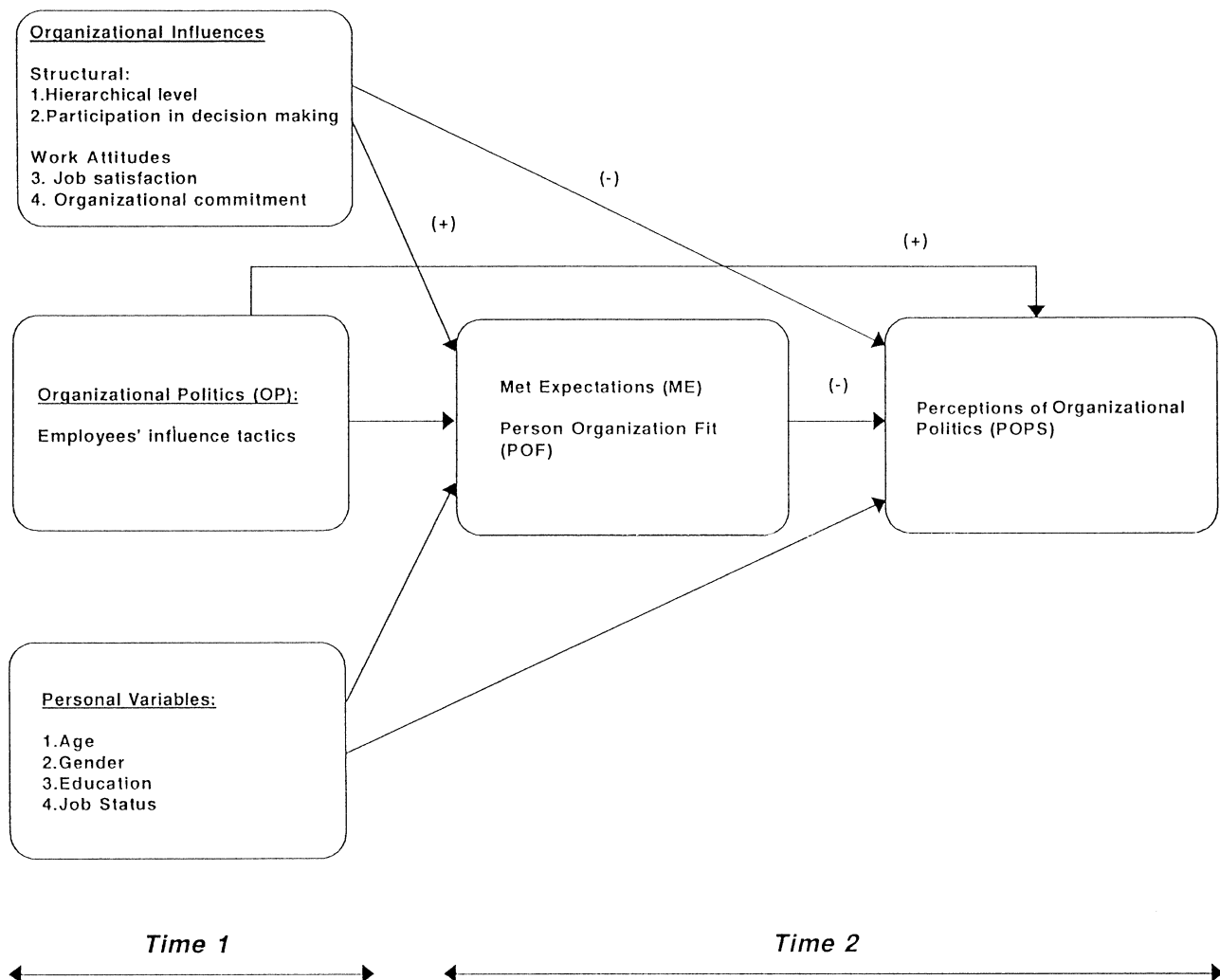


Fig. 1. The research model.

when observing what happens to others as they exercise influence tactics, is expected to affect one's perceptions of organizational politics. We also argue that the congruence between the individual and his/her work environment will mediate the relationship between employees' influence tactics and perceptions of politics. The rationale for this relationship is based on Hulin (1991) and Cropanzano et al. (1997, p. 163), who argued that individuals are more likely to have a positive evaluation of an organization when their goals are met than when their aspirations are threatened.

In the research model we propose that the two variables that mediate the relationship between actual politics and perceptions of politics are employees' level of ME and person–organization fit (POF). These are two well-established constructs reflecting the fit between an employee and his/her organization. Vroom (1964) argued that expectations significantly affect employees' motivation, perceptions, and performance in the workplace. The expectancy theory suggests that a better fit between individuals and their work environment enhances employees' ME. When one's personal characteristics and attitudes are close to those of the workplace a better fit can be expected to exist between the employee and her/his organization. The importance of fit and expectations in social life and their implications in the study of politics was further discussed by Molm (1997, p.4), according to whom actors in every social political system are motivated by the cost and benefits of their activities and the mutual political exchange relations with the environment. Those who better fit the organization and succeed in fulfilling self-expectations will tend to develop positive perceptions towards their social environment. Molm's basic argument is reflected in the expected relationship between employees' influence tactics and ME and POF as can be seen in Fig. 1. Thus,

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between employees' influence tactics and POPS is mediated by employees' ME and POF.

As described above, perceptions of politics in the workplace are expected to be affected by employees' actual political behavior. Employees are involved in political activities and use a variety of influence tactics (Kipnis et al., 1980). Sometimes these tactics will result in what the individual defines as successful outcomes, and this in turn will lead to a high degree of ME or fit between the employee and the organization. Employees who have achieved their goals feel that their expectations have been met and perceive a close fit between themselves and the organization; also they will tend to perceive the organization as less political. They will probably attribute their success to factors other than politics such as their own qualifications and level of performance at work. However, when influence tactics fail to achieve successful outcomes, the individual will feel that her/his expectations have not been met, and feelings of disappointment, frustration, and alienation will result. When

such feelings are created the emotional as well as the functional gap between a person and her/his organization widens. Consequently, employees' will tend to attribute their failure to achieve their goals to the political system of the organization rather than to their own failure (e.g., in applying the wrong influence tactics or trying to achieve high-risk goals with little chance of success). In short, the above explanation leads to

Hypothesis 2: ME and POF are negatively related to POPS.

2.4. Organizational structure factors, work attitudes, and personal influences

While the main goal of this study was to test the relationship between employee influence tactics (i.e., actual political behavior) and employee perceptions of organizational politics, one cannot ignore compelling research evidence that other factors are strongly related to POPS. A comprehensive approach would be to test the relationship between influence tactics and POPS controlling for the common antecedents of POPS. This would enable us to determine the contribution of influence tactics relative to that of other common antecedents. We argue that influence tactics should be an important component in any model of politics in an organization. The best way to examine this argument is to test the relationship between employee influence tactics and POPS together with other common predictors of POPS. If influence tactics are not significantly related to POPS when other determinants are included in the model, then one of our basic arguments will not have empirical support, and vice versa. Following Ferris et al. (1989), Ferris and Kacmar (1992), and Parker et al. (1995), we expected that POPS would be affected by structural factors, job/work factors, and personal factors. Variables representing each of the three categories are included in our model, as follows.

2.4.1. Organizational structure factors

Two variables were tested here: employees' hierarchical level and participation in decision making. We expected employees' hierarchical level and participation in decision making to affect POPS negatively, and in addition to affect ME and POF positively. As for POPS, a recent study by Ferris et al. (1996) noted that lower level employees tend to perceive their work environment as more political, perhaps because of their lack of involvement and control over different processes in the workplace. This argument was supported by Drory (1993) and Drory and Romm (1988) who found that while supervisors are more involved in organizational politics, they also define it as a natural part of their job, so their perceptions of politics are low. Participation in decision making largely reflects the power distribution in organizations. More participative employees also have more influence over decisions and processes at work. This might lead to a sense of fairness and justice,

which is expected to result in low perceptions of politics in the workplace. We expected employees' hierarchical level and participation in decision making to positively affect ME and POF because they represent integration into the workplace. By engaging in important activities such as decision-making processes or by working in high-level positions, employees express their identification and acceptance with the organization's norms and values. As a result, the perceptual and functional gap between the individual and his/her organization narrows, expectations are more likely to materialize, and POPS are more likely to diminish.

Hypothesis 3a: Employees' hierarchical level positively affects employees' ME and POF, and negatively affects perceptions of organizational politics (POPS).

Hypothesis 3b: Employees' participation in decision making positively affects employees' ME and POF, and negatively affects perceptions of organizational politics (POPS).

2.4.2. Job/work attitudes

The two constructs tested here were job satisfaction and organizational commitment. While the basic model of Ferris et al. (1989) and subsequent studies paid much attention to job/work environment factors, little has been given to job satisfaction and organizational commitment as predictors of POPS. The present study argues that job satisfaction and organizational commitment should be included in the model as predictors of POPS. Accordingly, high perceptions of organizational politics may be the result of negative work attitudes such as low job satisfaction and low organizational commitment. The rationale for this relationship is based on POF theory (Vroom, 1964; Porter et al., 1975; Schein, 1978; Chatman, 1989; Tosi, 1992) applied by Papa and Canary (1995) and Cropanzano et al. (1997). According to these studies, highly satisfied employees are expected to show high fit with the organization, and are also expected to have better chances to fulfill their expectations at work. When POF emerges and expectations are met, one feels that one has a fair chance of materializing essential interests in the workplace. One will perceive the organization as a work setting offering equal opportunities, and as sensitive and responsive to the needs of every member; this will eventually result in low perception of politics. A similar rationale can be applied in the case of organizational commitment. High organizational commitment represents a desire to retain membership in the organization, belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization, and willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization (Porter et al., 1974). Therefore, it yields a high fit between the employees' individual values and attitudes and those of their organization (Chatman, 1989). In line with this, high organizational commitment is expected to positively affect POF as well as employees' ME. On the other hand, it is expected to negatively affect

employees' perceptions of politics, which reflect feelings of alienation, mistrust, and dissatisfaction with the organization's power distribution and with the ability to attain one's desired interests. Thus:

Hypothesis 3c: Job satisfaction positively affects employees' ME and POF, and negatively affects perceptions of organizational politics (POPS).

Hypothesis 3d: Organizational commitment positively affects employees' ME and POF, and negatively affects perceptions of organizational politics (POPS).

2.4.3. Personal influences

We examined the effect of age, gender, education, and job status as control variables and potential predictors of POPS. As reported by Ferris et al. (1996), previous research did not show consistent findings on a relationship between personal variables and POPS. Therefore, no specific hypotheses were formulated here and the personal variables were used more as control variables. However, a brief account of the rationale for selecting these four variables is desirable. As for gender, some studies (e.g., Fernandez, 1981; Rosen, 1982; Ferris et al., 1989) found that female employees perceive organizations as more political in nature than male employees. Other studies argued that males tend to be more involved in organizational politics and this close familiarity with the organization's political system should lead to acceptance of the political processes as a natural and normative part of organizational life (Drory and Beaty, 1991).

Mixed results are also reported for the relationship of age and POPS. Some studies found it positive and some negative (Gandz and Murray, 1980; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Parker et al., 1995). Ferris et al. (1996) tended to agree with the notion that perceptions of politics decrease with and are tempered by age since anyone familiar with the realities of how organizations operate may be less prone to cognitively process, evaluate, and interpret events as being political in nature. ME and higher fit with the organization are more likely to be found among older employees, who are also more tenured in the organization. Older employees are more familiar with the organization, depend on it more, and accept it as a substantial part of their life.

As for education, highly educated employees are expected to invest more effort in search of jobs which better suit their personality and attitudes. Therefore, their expectations are more likely to be met and their perceptions of organizational politics to be lower than those of less educated employees. Permanent employees are usually those who have decided to stay with the organization for a long time. By providing them with permanency the organization basically shows them that they are among its core employees. Therefore, they are expected to show greater fit with the work environment, high ME, and, eventually, fewer perceptions of politics.

As mentioned, we proposed no specific directional hypotheses for the relationships between the personal

variables and POPS. These are included in the model following the recommendations of Ferris et al. (1989, 1996) and Parker et al. (1995). Finally, as presented in Fig. 1, we expected

Hypothesis 4: ME and POF mediate the relationship between structural variables, work attitudes and personal influences, and perceptions of organizational politics (POPS).

3. Method

3.1. Sample and procedure

Because of the longitudinal design of this study, a two-phase survey of 411 employees in two local municipalities located in northern Israel was conducted between May 1996 and January 1997. At time 1 (T_1) employees were asked to provide information about their influence tactics towards others in the work setting (supervisors, co-workers, subordinates), work attitudes, and organizational/structural and personal variables. At time 2 (T_2), 6 months later, we returned to those who had completed the questionnaires at T_1 and distributed a second survey including the variables POF, ME, and perceptions of political scale. Participation in the entire research was voluntary and employees were assured of full confidentiality in the data analysis. A total of 343 usable questionnaires (return rate of 83.5%) at T_1 and 303 questionnaires (return rate of 88.3%) at T_2 were used in the final analysis. Data analysis was performed on those who participated at T_1 and T_2 , namely 303 employees comprising a return rate of 73.7%. A breakdown by occupation showed that 16.8% of the sample were blue-collar employees, 42.7% clerical and administrative workers, 11% high-technical workers, and 29.5% engineers, architects, and other professionals; 56% of the sample were female, 77% married, 89% had a full-time job, and 33% were low-level or middle-level managers. Average age was 44.2 years ($SD=10.3$); average tenure in the organizations was 11.8 ($SD=8.6$). Of the respondents, 32% held a BA degree or higher. The demographic characteristics of the sample were quite similar to those of the total population in the two organizations that participated in the study: 57% females, 74% married, average age 45, average tenure in the organization 9 years, and 31% with BA degree or higher.

3.2. Measures

Table 1 provides a list of the research measures, sample items, and a total number of items used for each measure.

3.2.1. POPS

The variable perceptions of organizational politics was measured at T_2 by the shorter version of POPS which was first developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) and re-

examined by Kacmar and Carlson (1994). The above studies, like this one, defined POPS as the degree to which the respondents view their work environment as political, and therefore unjust and unfair. While the Kacmar and Ferris's original scale included 40 items, we have followed Kacmar and Carlson's study that used the most parsimonious set of only 12 items. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), so that a higher score means higher POPS. Reliability of the scale was 0.77, which is quite similar to that reported in other studies (e.g., 0.74 in Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; 0.76 in Parker et al., 1995).

3.2.2. Influence tactics (actual organizational politics)

This variable was measured at T_1 . It represents actual political behavior in the work environment and was based on the scale used by Kipnis et al. (1980) and other studies (Erez and Rim, 1982; Block, 1988; Tosi, 1992; Yukl and Tracey, 1992). The measure combined three subscales of 14 items each, totaling 42 items. In line with Kipnis et al. (1980) and Yukl and Tracey (1992), each scale represents influence tactics towards a different target: supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates. The 14 items of each group were identical to the other two groups except for the target persons they referred to: supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they used the following influence tactic in their organization on a 5-point scale from 1 (never or very seldom) to 5 (very frequently or always). The correlation among the three 14-item constructs was very high. Factor analysis likewise showed no meaningful distinction among the three scales, so we decided to combine them. The coefficient alpha internal consistency of the final 42-item scale was 0.93.

3.2.3. Hierarchical level

This variable measures the position of an employee in the organization. Following Ferris et al. (1996) it was measured at T_1 as a dichotomous variable (0 = employee; 1 = manager).

3.2.4. Participation in decision-making

This variable was measured at T_1 , and was defined as the extent to which staff members participated in setting the goals and policies of the entire organization. It was measured by 4 items adopted from Aiken and Hage (1968). Respondents were asked how frequently they participated in decisions on the following issues: (1) promotion of any of the professional staff; (2) adoption of new policies; (3) adoption of new programs; (4) hiring of new staff. The scale ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Reliability of this scale was 0.85.

3.2.5. Job satisfaction

This variable was measured at T_1 . Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with six aspects of their job: current job, coworkers, supervisors, current salary, opportunities for promotion, and work in general.

Table 1
Sample items for the research measures

Variables	Number of items	Sample items
1. POPS	12	(1) “Favoritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead around here”; (2) “Rewards come only to those who work hard in this organization” (R); (3) “There is a group of people in my department who always get things their way because no one wants to challenge them.”
2. ME	9	(1) “In the last year, my experiences with my immediate supervision have been...”; (2) “In the last year, my experiences with the work that I do have been...” (3) “In the last year, my experiences with my co-workers have been...”
3. POF	13	(1a) “This organization encourages and rewards loyalty” versus (1b) “I believe organizational loyalty should be encouraged and rewarded”; (2a) “This organization offers long-term employment security” versus (2b) “I believe organizations should offer long-term employment security to their employees.”
4. OP/influence tactics	3 × 14 = 42	(1) “In order to influence my boss (or subordinates/co-workers) I make him/her feel important”; (2) “I use personal contacts in my efforts to influence my boss (or subordinates/co-workers)”; (3) “I make a formal appeal to higher levels to back up my request”; (4) “I obtain the support of co-workers to back up my request.”
5. Job satisfaction	6	(1) “How satisfied are you with your current job?”; (2) “How satisfied are you with your coworkers?”; (3) “How satisfied are you with your supervisors?”; (4) “How satisfied are you with your current salary?”
6. Organizational commitment	9	(1) “I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization”; (2) “I really care about the fate of this organization”; (3) “I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for the organization.”
7. Hierarchical level (1 = managers)	1	Dichotomous variable (0 = employee; 1 = manager).
8. Participation in decision making	4	(1) “How frequently do you participate in decisions on promotion of any of the professional staff?”; (2) “How frequently do you participate in decisions on adoption of new policies?” (3) “How frequently do you participate in decisions on adoption of new programs?” (4) “How frequently do you participate in decisions on hiring of new staff?”

(R) = Reverse Item.

The scale for these questions ranged from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). This measure was developed by Schriesheim and Tsui (1980). Note that the reliability in this sample (0.77) is quite similar to that reported by Tsui et al. (1992) in an American sample (0.73).

3.2.6. Organizational commitment

This variable was measured at T_1 by the most commonly used measure of organizational commitment, the attitudinal Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) introduced by Porter and Smith (1970). The scale, also known as the Porter et al. measure (1974), is “the most visible measure of affective commitment [and] has enjoyed widespread acceptance and use” (Griffin and Bateman, 1986, p. 170). In its shortened 9-item version the measure reflects the three dimensions of the definition of commitment suggested by Porter et al.: (1) desire to retain membership in the organization; (2) belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization; and (3) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization. Mowday et al. (1979) and Mowday et al. (1982) demonstrated the well-proven psychometric properties of this measure. The scale for this measure ranged

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and the reliability was 0.88.

3.2.7. Personal influences

The personal variables included two dichotomous variables: gender (0 = male; 1 = female), and job status (0 = tenure; 1 = temporary). They also included the variable education, which was measured as an ordinal variable on a scale from 1 (partial high-school education) to 5 (master's or higher degree). Age was measured as a ratio variable. All the personal variables were measured at T_1 .

3.2.8. ME

According to Wanous et al. (1992, p. 288) employee's ME represents the discrepancy between what a person encounters on the job in the way of positive and negative experiences and what he/she expected to encounter. This variable was measured at T_2 by a 9-item scale applied by Lee and Mowday (1987). Respondents were asked to describe how well their expectations about their immediate supervisor, kind of work, co-workers, subordinates, physical working conditions, financial rewards, career future and organizational identification, and their overall jobs had been met in recent months. The scale for this measure ranged

from 1 (less than expected) to 5 (more than expected). Reliability was 0.83, close to the 0.85 reliability found by Lee and Mowday (1987).

3.2.9. POF

A comprehensive 15-item scale for the measurement of POF was suggested by Bretz and Judge (1994, p. 37–38). This scale was proposed to cover four different perspectives of fit. The first assessed the degree to which individual knowledge, skills, and abilities match job requirements. The second determined the degree of congruence between individual needs and organizational reinforcement system and structure. The third matched patterns of organizational values and patterns of individual values. The fourth perspective concerned individual personality and perceived organizational image as key constructs of POF. We applied all four dimensions of Bretz and Judge's (1994) scale with one exception: the scale here included only 13 items because we decided to omit two items unsuited to a public sector setting. The scale included two sets of questions, the first asking respondents to indicate how descriptive each statement was of their current organizational environment. The second set asked them to indicate how well each statement described them personally. Naturally, the two sets were quite similar in content. In line with Bretz and Judge (1994) the amount of fit was operationalized as the sum of the differences between responses to corresponding items on the two sets of questions. The scale for each item was of 5 points, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (definitely true). This scale was applied at T_2 and its reliability was 0.78.

3.3. Data analysis

The main statistical analyses in this study were multiple and hierarchical regressions. To support the hypotheses regarding the mediated relationship among influence tactics, work attitudes, structural and personal variables, and perceptions of politics we followed James and Brett (1984) and Baron and Kenny (1986). According to them, a mediating relationship can be supported in one or more of the following methods: (1) regression analysis, (2) ANOVA or MANOVA, and (3) testing for interactions. Nevertheless, Baron and Kenny (1986) elaborated on the simplicity and the effectiveness of regression analysis, compared with the limited test for mediation in other methods such as ANOVA. Accordingly, we applied the regression analysis method, in which, as described by Baron and Kenny (1986, p. 1177), to test for mediation one estimates the following three regression equations. First, the mediator is regressed on the independent variable, whereby the independent variable must affect the mediator. Second, the dependent variable is regressed on the independent variable, whereby the independent variable must affect the dependent variable. Third, the dependent

variable is regressed on both the independent variable and on the mediator, whereby the mediator must affect the dependent variable. If these conditions all hold in the predicted direction, then the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less in the third equation than in the second.

4. Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and reliabilities of the research variables. The measures displayed sound psychometric properties and the correlations among the independent variables were not high except for the relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction ($r=0.56$; $p<0.001$), which is very typical for these variables. These findings support the absence of multicollinearity between the research variables. The correlation matrix shows a positive relationship between employee's influence tactics which represent actual politics (OP), and POPS ($r=0.16$; $p<0.01$). ME and POF were negatively related to POPS, as was predicted by Hypothesis 2 ($r=-0.52$, $p<0.001$; $r=-0.47$, $p<0.001$, respectively). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment positively affected ME ($r=0.50$, $p<0.001$; $r=0.41$, $p<0.001$, respectively) and POF ($r=0.28$, $p<0.001$; $r=0.27$, $p<0.001$, respectively) as was predicted in the first part of Hypotheses 3c and 3d. Thus, the correlations provide some support for the research model.

Table 3 shows the result of two multiple regressions that were conducted following the first term for mediation of Baron and Kenny (1986), namely significant relationship between the mediator and the independent variable. In each of the equations the mediating variables (ME and POF) were regressed on the independent variables. The findings in Table 3 generally support the first term for mediation mentioned above. Significant relationships existed between the independent and dependent variables in both equations. The relationships were stronger for ME as dependent variable than for POF. Influence tactics were strongly and significantly related to ME but not to POF. Thus, a more appropriate conclusion is that ME was a good mediator while POF showed no mediating effect. The general conclusion is that the findings of Table 3 meet the first requirement for mediation as described by Baron and Kenny (1986). This requirement, however, holds for ME and not for POF.

The findings of Table 3 provide no support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b. No significant relationships were found between the two mediators, ME and POF, and hierarchical level and participation in decision making, which partially support Hypotheses 3c and 3d. Organizational commitment and job satisfaction were strongly related to the two mediators. It is also interesting that three personal variables (i.e., gender, education, and job status) were related to POF while none related to ME.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and intercorrelations among research variables (reliabilities in parentheses)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. POPS ^b	3.06	0.60	(0.77)										
2. ME ^b	3.06	0.67	-0.52***	(0.83)									
3. POF ^b	3.35	0.67	-0.47***	0.43***	(0.78)								
4. OP/influence tactics ^a	1.74	0.46	0.16**	-0.14*	-0.05	(0.93)							
5. Job satisfaction ^a	3.53	0.67	-0.30***	0.50***	0.28***	-0.06	(0.77)						
6. Organizational commitment ^a	3.63	0.77	-0.26***	0.41***	0.27***	-0.07	0.58***	(0.88)					
7. Hierarchical level (1 = managers) ^a	0.34	0.48	-0.02	0.06	-0.02	0.32***	0.14*	-0.02	-				
8. Participation in decision making ^a	1.92	0.97	-0.04	0.11	0.02	0.38***	0.24***	0.05	0.48***	(0.85)			
9. Age ^a	44.34	10.23	-0.09	0.09	-0.01	0.02	0.07	0.10	0.24***	0.18**	-		
10. Gender (1 = female) ^a	0.57	0.50	0.19***	-0.18**	-0.21***	-0.08	-0.20***	-0.20***	-0.13*	-0.17**	-0.29***	-	
11. Education ^a	2.71	1.42	-0.12*	0.04	0.09	0.08	0.04	-0.13*	0.10	-0.09	0.03	0.05	-
12. Job status (1 = temporary) ^a	0.15	0.35	-0.17**	0.12*	0.08	-0.01	0.09	0.05	-0.20***	-0.16**	-0.31***	0.03	0.25***

N = 296–303 due to missing values.

^a Variables measured at time *T*₁.

^b Variables measured at time *T*₂.

* *p* ≤ 0.05.

** *p* ≤ 0.01.

*** *p* ≤ 0.001.

Table 4 reports the data for the second and third requirements for mediation described by Baron and Kenny (1986), demonstrating the results of two multiple regressions. In the first equation, POPS were regressed on the independent variables with the exclusion of the effect of the assumed mediating factors (ME and POF), as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) in their second term for mediation. In the second equation of Table 4, POPS were regressed on the independent and mediating variables by using a hierarchical regression method. This was done to estimate the relative contribution of the predicted mediating factors (ME and POF) to the explanation of POPS. Although this estimation was not part of the research hypotheses, one should note the significant and relatively strong affect of ME and POF on POPS. This finding supports the conceptual arguments of this study expecting strong relationships between POF and ME, as mediating factors, and the dependent variable, POPS. This approach follows Ferris et al. (1996), who also used the hierarchical regression method to test for mediation in a model of organizational politics. The mediating factors were entered into the equation in the first step, while all other independent variables were entered in the second step.

The second term for mediation requires that the independent variable/s affect the dependent variable. The first equation in Table 4 shows clearly that this requirement was satisfied. Many of the independent variables were significantly related to POPS, including influence tactics, the two work attitudes (organizational commitment and job satisfaction), and three of the personal variables. The effect of influence tactics on POPS is worth noting in particular. Thus, the main conclusion from the findings of the first

equation in Table 4 is that the second requirement for mediation has empirical support. Some other notable findings of this equation are as follows. First, the findings do not

Table 3
Findings of multiple regression analysis (standardized coefficients) for the effect of independent variables on ME and POF (*t*-test in parentheses)

Variables	ME	POF
1. OP/influence tactics	-0.15 (-2.69**)	-0.04 (-0.65)
<i>Work attitudes</i>		
2. Job satisfaction	0.35 (5.33***)	0.17 (2.39*)
3. Organizational commitment	0.19 (3.01**)	0.16 (2.24*)
<i>Structural variables</i>		
4. Hierarchical level (1 = managers)	0.04 (0.74)	-0.02 (-0.32)
5. Participation in decision making	0.04 (0.64)	-0.04 (-0.49)
<i>Personal variables</i>		
6. Age	0.04 (0.62)	-0.08 (-1.26)
7. Gender (1 = female)	-0.09 (-1.63)	-0.19 (-3.24***)
8. Education	0.04 (0.67)	0.12 (1.97*)
9. Job status (1 = temporary)	0.11 (1.88)	0.01 (0.14)
<i>R</i> ²	0.31	0.15
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.29	0.12
<i>F</i>	13.66***	5.11***

N = 296–303 due to missing values.

* *p* ≤ 0.05.

** *p* ≤ 0.01.

*** *p* ≤ 0.001.

Table 4

Findings of standard and hierarchical regression analysis (standardized coefficients) for the effect of independent variables on perceptions of organizational politics and the role of ME and POF as mediators (*t*-test in parentheses)

Variables	The effect of independent variables on POPS (ME and POF not included in equation)	The effect of independent variables on POPS controlling for ME and POF	
		Step 1	Step 2
1. ME	–	–0.39 (–7.14***)	–0.33 (–5.35***)
2. POF	–	–0.30 (–5.55***)	–0.29 (–5.16***)
3. OP/influence tactics	0.19 (3.10**)	–	0.13 (2.34*)
<i>Work attitudes</i>			
4. Job satisfaction	–0.16 (–2.26*)	–	0.01 (0.07)
5. Organizational commitment	–0.14 (–1.97*)	–	–0.03 (–0.44)
<i>Structural variables</i>			
6. Hierarchical level (1 = managers)	–0.03 (–0.44)	–	–0.02 (–0.35)
7. Participation in decision making	–0.03 (–0.41)	–	–0.03 (–0.41)
<i>Personal variables</i>			
8. Age	–0.06 (–0.98)	–	–0.07 (–1.30)
9. Gender (1 = female)	0.15 (2.54**)	–	–0.06 (1.21)
10. Education	–0.12 (–1.97*)	–	–0.07 (–1.34)
11. Job status (1 = temporary)	–0.16 (–2.66**)	–	–0.13 (–2.31*)
R^2	0.19	0.34	0.38
Adjusted R^2	0.16	0.33	0.35
F	7.01***	71.00***	14.69***
ΔR^2	–	–	0.04
F for ΔR^2	–	–	10.67***

$N = 296 - 303$ due to missing values.

* $p \leq 0.05$.

** $p \leq 0.01$.

*** $p \leq 0.001$.

support Hypotheses 3a and b, which expected a significant relationship between hierarchical level and participation in decision-making with POPS. Second, the findings do support Hypotheses 3c and d, which predicted that job satisfaction and organizational commitment would negatively affect POPS. Third, although no hypotheses were formulated for the personal variables, the effects of gender, education, and job status on POPS were significant. These findings show that women, less educated employees, and higher tenured employees tended to perceive their work environment as more political (i.e., high POPS).

The second equation in Table 4 provides the information for the third requirement for mediation, namely regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variables and the mediators. Here, we performed a two-step regression analysis, where in the first step the dependent variable was regressed on the mediators, and in the second step the dependent variable was regressed on both the independent variables and the mediators. This two-step regression was proposed by Ferris et al. (1996) to allow a more sensitive evaluation of the third condition for mediation: the mediators must affect the dependent variable, and, more importantly, the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable must be less in the third equation (the two-step equation in Table 4) than in the second (the first

equation in Table 4). The findings in Table 4 provide empirical support for the third condition of mediation. First, the data strongly support Hypothesis 2, which posited that employees' influence tactics/actual politics will indirectly affect POPS. Most of the variance in POPS was due to the effect of ME and POF ($R^2 = 34\%$), while all other variables (including OP) contributed only 4% to the total explained variance. Second, if we compare the contribution of the independent variables to the explained variance of POPS when ME and POF were not controlled ($R^2 = 19\%$) with the contribution when both ME and POF were controlled ($R^2 = 4\%$), we can easily conclude that the third condition for mediation was met. The data in Table 4 support Hypothesis 4 when we compare the first equation in Table 4 with the last one in the table, namely the one performed in step 2. The data clearly show that the effect of each of the independent variables, including employees' influence tactics, was less in the last regression equation than in the first regression of Table 4. For example, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which had significant effects on POPS in the first equation, demonstrated no significant effects in the last one, when the two mediators were included in the equation. Two personal variables, gender and education, which were significant in the first equation of Table 4, became non-significant in the last one. Other

variables such as influence tactics and job status remained significant, but their effects became much weaker when the two presumed mediators that were included in the equation. This is demonstrated in the lower coefficients of these variables in the last equation than in the first, the one without ME and POF. All these findings are much in line with the third condition for mediation of Baron and Kenny (1986). Note, however, that they basically hold for ME and not for POF because the former was not related to the independent variables as required in the first condition for mediation. Hence, the findings in Table 4 support Hypothesis 4 for the variable ME but not for the variable POF. ME was found as a mediator of the relationship between all the independent variables and POPS.

5. Discussion

This study examined whether and how employees' influence tactics affected perceptions of organizational politics. It also tested the effects of other determinants such as work attitudes and personal constructs on perceptions of politics. The results supported positive effects of employees' influence tactics on POPS. They also showed that this effect was mediated by employees' ME. The mediating effect of POF was not supported mainly because POF showed no relationship with influence tactics as can be seen in Table 3. Moreover, ME mediated the effect of some work attitudes as well as some personal variables on POPS. In many ways this study supported the notion that perceptions of organizational politics are affected by the success or failure of actual political behavior. The findings gave empirical support to the following process of politics in organizations, some parts of which were advanced in other research (e.g., Randolph, 1985; Kumar and Ghadially, 1989; Ferris and King, 1991; Wayne et al., 1997). Organizational politics and employees' influence tactics function as tools by which the employee can progress in the organization. When actual politics contributes to the fulfillment of employees' expectations, perceptions of politics become lower and the organization is perceived as just and fair. However, when individuals' expectations are not met, feelings of maladjustment to the organization arise, perceptions of politics become higher, and the entire work setting is perceived as unjust, unfair, and "political" in nature.

The findings hold beyond simple correlative relationships. Most of the data and conclusions on OP have been based on cross-sectional designs that are too limited for any causal conclusions on the relationships among the variables. Our longitudinal design enabled us to draw causal conclusions on some of the relationships found here. While our model was based in part on an earlier model of perceptions of organizational politics suggested by Ferris et al. (1989), a contribution of this study in this

regard is that it allows us to reexamine some of the findings proposed and tested by Ferris et al. (1989) using a longitudinal design.

Another important contribution is the addition of employees' influence tactics, which represent individuals' actual political behavior (Kipnis et al., 1980), to the factors that need to be considered in OP models. Most studies on OP used perceptions of politics as the main concept for the study of politics in organizations, and omitted actual political behavior from their models. This study found that both constructs are important for understanding politics in organizations (Cropanzano et al., 1997). Our research related behavioral and perceptual dimensions of politics, and its findings support an indirect model in which ME mediates the relationship between political behavior and attitudes. The findings demonstrate the importance of ME for understanding politics in the workplace. However, in regard to POF, the findings are mixed and do not support a mediating effect of this construct.

We found high POF and ME to have been positively and strongly correlated. Both represent good congruence between the individual and the workplace but only ME mediated the relationship between influence tactics and perceptions of politics. ME highlights the importance of expectations in the work environment as a factor that enhances positive reactions and attitudes towards the organization. POF was found to have a more direct effect on perceptions of politics and may be included in further studies as part of the job/work influences on politics perceptions (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). As was noted by O'Reilly et al. (1991), a good fit results in positive work-related outcomes. Those who have better fit to the organization are socially and politically supported by the organization's members and systems (Bretz and Judge, 1994) and thus tend to have lower levels of perceptions of politics.

Some of the relationships founded here of work attitudes and structural and personal variables to POPS are similar to those found in other studies. For example, other studies also found political perceptions to be negatively related to job satisfaction (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Zhou and Ferris, 1995; Ferris et al., 1996) and organizational commitment (Drory, 1993; Cropanzano et al., 1997). Yet while these studies could only conclude that the variables were related, our longitudinal design enabled us to determine a casual relationship in which job satisfaction and organizational commitment affected POPS. We found no evidence for the effect of structural variables on POPS. However, some support was found for the effect of gender and education on POPS, while age was not related to them. Women workers and less educated workers tended to perceive the workplace as more political than did men and more educated employees. These findings are in line with the studies of Ferris and Kacmar (1992) and Ferris et al. (1996). Our findings also support our hypotheses regarding the effects of job satisfaction and organizational commitment on POPS,

ME, and POF. As noted earlier, this study predicted that both variables would positively affect ME and POF, and negatively affect POPS. In line with Hypothesis 4, ME mediated the relationship among work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational commitment), personal variables (e.g., gender, education, and job status), and POPS. While the Ferris et al. (1989) model mentioned the important effect of job/work influences on POPS, it disregarded the potential contribution of work attitudes to the explanation of organizational political perceptions. Our study enriches the set of antecedents that may affect POPS, and we recommend that further studies include work attitudes among the job/work influences mentioned in the Ferris et al. (1989) model.

However, the findings did not support our expectation regarding the effects of structural variables on ME, POF, and POPS, as was suggested by Drory and Romm (1988), Ferris et al. (1989, 1996), Drory (1993), and Bretz and Judge (1994). Participation in decision making showed no relationship with POPS. These findings further contradict the previous results of Ferris et al. (1996), who found a negative relationship between centralization and POPS. Our speculation is that participation in decision making is a less important predictor of POPS when considered with other work attitudes in the same equation. Another explanation for this somewhat surprising finding is the specific setting in our study which engaged employees with relatively low levels of participation (mean = 1.92; SD = 0.97). Hence, we recommend that future studies elaborate on the effect of more participatory respondents than in ours.

While other studies found that hierarchical level was related to POPS (e.g., Ferris et al., 1996) we found no such relationship. An implication of this finding may be that, under certain conditions, POPS are subject to change at all levels of the organizations. Another possible explanation may be found in the study of Parker et al. (1995). They found a non-linear relationship between employees' hierarchical level and perceptions of organizational politics. The findings indicated that the relationship was affected by employees' type of occupation (clerical, engineers, project managers, etc.). Since in this study we did not include participants' occupation among the independent variables, we were able to test only the general linear relationship between structural variables and POPS. This may be the reason for the lack here of significant relationships between structural variables and POPS. Moreover, the findings of this study may indicate that structural factors are less important in explaining perceptions of politics, as well as person–environment fit and expectations, than job/work attitudes, actual political behavior, and other personal constructs (Parker et al., 1995, p. 903). It is however noteworthy that one possible limitation of all the above studies, and this one, may be the dichotomous construct of hierarchical level. Hence, future studies might benefit from using

a more sensitive measure of hierarchical level and a more heterogeneous population.

The fact that this study was not conducted in a North American setting constitutes another possible advantage. Most studies on OP were performed in that culture, and so a cross-cultural comparison has not been possible until now. Our study provides evidence from another culture for a similar relationship between organizational politics and a set of work attitudes, structural variables, and personal variables that were suggested by Ferris et al. (1989). These findings promote the idea that the basic model of Ferris et al. (1989) can be applied in other cultures and thus enhance the possibility of trans-cultural implications. In addition, this study examined OP in the Israeli public sector, which differs in many ways from the typical North American public and private sectors. Therefore, our results may be useful in future attempts to compare organizational politics in private and public systems. The model and the empirical strategy should also be replicated in other settings and cultures to support these ideas.

Finally, several limitations of this research should be mentioned. First, the fact that major constructs of our study were self-reported raises a potential problem of source bias or general method variance. Therefore, the findings must be interpreted cautiously. Although data were collected at two different time points, one should notice that the mediating variables and the dependent variable were all measured in the same time (T_2). Perhaps our failure to support a mediating effect of POF on the relationship between influence tactics and POPS was partly due to this fact. While the intercorrelations among our measures were not very high and lowered the possibility of common method error, this effect cannot be totally ignored. A possible strategy to overcome this potential bias is to adopt a technique that separates the measurement of dependent and independent variables. Future studies may use this recommendation as a guide for better models in the study of organizational politics. Yet one should note that because the multivariate analysis considered the simultaneous effects of all variables, the extent of this problem was reduced.

Second, despite the longitudinal design, one may argue that an interval of 6 months between T_1 and T_2 may not be sufficient if one seeks to more strongly support the relationships as described by the research hypotheses. For example, this time span may be too short for employees' influence tactics to affect ME and POF. Nevertheless, the fact that a 6-month interval yielded some significant and interesting findings, which are much in line with our theoretical arguments, it is encouraging and deserves more attention as well as further development and empirical examination. Future studies should also look for close or similar relationships to those suggested in the present model, but perhaps should consider using a longer interval or more phases of data collection, thus allowing the opportunity for stronger results to manifest themselves. This strategy may also help

to overcome the limitation of common method variance between the mediating and the independent variables. A longer period of time between measurements will probably contribute to minimizing this possibility and create more robust measures.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study have demonstrated the usefulness of concepts such as employees' influence tactics, ME, and POP for our understanding of the process of OP. As suggested by Ferris et al. (1996, p. 262), "there is a vast area of social and political dynamics in organizations that remains largely unexplored." Organizational politics should be examined using an integrative approach that involves behavioral and perceptual dimensions, which together may shed more light on this important phenomenon. The contribution of this study is to propose and test such an approach. Future studies should replicate the findings of this one, particularly the role of influence tactics and mediating constructs such as those examined here.

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