

Does organisational politics always hurt employee performance? Moderating–mediating model

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the job demands-resources theory, this study investigates the mediating role of job satisfaction and the moderating roles of abusive supervision and perceived organisational support (POS) in the relationship between perception of organisational politics (POP) and employee job performance. This study hypothesised that employees with high POS and low abusive supervision can function effectively even in organisations with a high level of organisational politics.

Design/methodology/approach – The study was conducted anonymously on 408 employees, from companies operating in Poland which were completed using the computer-assisted telephone interview method. Statistical verifications of the moderation and mediation analyses were conducted with PROCESS macro.

Findings – The results showed that a high level of POP does not diminish employee performance when employees perceive low levels of abusive supervision and a high level of POS. Furthermore, the results revealed that job satisfaction mediates between POP and employee performance.

Originality/value – This study integrated research on politics, abusive supervision and POS to examine the collective impact of these variables on employee performance. The findings have important implications in terms of the potential buffering that can be applied to reduce the negative impacts resulting from POP.

Keywords Perception of organisational politics, Abusive supervision, Job satisfaction, Perceived organisational support, Job performance

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Let no Prince complain of the faults committed by a people under his control; since these must be ascribed either to his negligence, or to his being himself blemished by similar defects.

Niccolo Machiavelli, Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius.

Politics is a widespread phenomenon, not only in contemporary organisations, but also in every type of organisation in history in which people competed for scarce resources or pursued their own goals (Ferris and Treadway, 2012). Many studies and empirical research show that intra-organisational political action can play a positive and functional role for both organisational processes and employee outcomes (Maher *et al.*, 2022). In particular, some research argues that politics can be a mechanism for restoring justice, providing for followers and as a source of positive change (Ferris *et al.*, 2019).

Despite the many positive effects that have been shown for organisational policies, numerous recent research studies have shifted its focus from the objective or intersubjective properties of politics on perception of organisational politics (POP). POP is usually described

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as an individual's subjective evaluation about the extent to which their work environment is characterised by co-workers and supervisors who demonstrate self-serving behaviours (Ferris *et al.*, 2019). This perspective assumes that individuals actively manage situations in ways that elicit egoistic desired actions and outcomes.

Consistent with the common characterisation of POP as the “dark side” of organisational life (Chang *et al.*, 2009), meta-analytic studies demonstrate that POP has detrimental effects on trust, job satisfaction, commitment, well-being and employee performance (Miller *et al.*, 2008; Chang *et al.*, 2009; Bedi and Schat, 2013). However, knowledge of the psychological mechanisms that explain the impact of organisational politics is still limited (Ferris *et al.*, 2019; Maher *et al.*, 2021). For example, Kane-Frieder *et al.* (2014) find that engaged employees are less stressed, more satisfied and perform better even when they perceive a higher level of politics. Other studies also show a moderating effect between POP and employee outcomes via ruminations (Rosen and Hochwarter, 2014), psychological capital (Abbas *et al.*, 2014), organisational structures (Yang, 2017), level of transcendence (Lawong *et al.*, 2018), self-regulation (Palmer *et al.*, 2020), organisational loyalty (Ellen *et al.*, 2022b), or employee' political skills and leader–member exchange (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, some prior work (e.g. Ellen *et al.*, 2022b; Hochwarter *et al.*, 2022) suggested that POP has nonlinear impact on job satisfaction and performance; namely, that there is a positive relationship for low-to-moderate levels of POP and a negative relationship at moderate-to-high levels on POP.

Pointing to the lack of a full understanding of how perceptions of politics influence employee outcomes, many authors (Ferris *et al.*, 2019; Hochwarter *et al.*, 2020; Maher *et al.*, 2021) call upon future researchers to examine contextual and individual difference factors as moderators in such relationships. In particular, there is a need to clarify the circumstances that intensify POP (moving from low to high levels), or reduce the level of POP, and thus enable employees to cope effectively.

In regard to this demand and to clarify the effect of POP, this study using the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) is dedicated to probing the equivocal relationship between POP and employee performance. From the many potential factors that can influence this relationship, one of the most important, and relatively rarely tested to date, is leadership (Ellen *et al.*, 2022a; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2022). Leaders in organisational settings, through the tactics and behaviours they employ, can either contribute to improved employee functioning or exacerbate stress and increase negative work outcomes (Ejaz *et al.*, 2021). In particular, this influence can be stronger and more destructive due to leaders' manifestations of hostility and abusive actions (Tepper *et al.*, 2012). Abusive supervision as a behavioural style of leaders may reflect political activity in work organisations and thus intensify the stress experienced by employees. In addition, destructive behaviours by leaders can contribute to an intensification of the political climate in the organisation (Ferris *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the ability of employees to cope with demands is exceeded, and negative effects appear in employees' outcomes.

According to the JD-R theory, it can be assumed that access to resources important for an employee may counterbalance the impact of job demands on employee performance. Therefore allowing employees to eliminate the importance of their immediate supervisor and achieve professional goals regardless of toxic relationships with them. In the organisational context, perceived organisational support (POS) serve as the most important resources which may reduce the negative influence of hindrance stressors on employee outcomes (Byrne *et al.*, 2005; Naseer *et al.*, 2018).

In other words, in this study was assumed that high POS and low-intensity abusive supervision allow employees to function efficiently even in organisations with a high level of politics. Similarly, high abusive supervision with lack of employee access to organisational resources leads to a strong and negative relationship between POP and employee outcomes.

Overall, in the study was developed a moderating–mediating model in an attempt to depict the relationship between POP and employee outcomes. By doing so, this research contributes to

the extant literature in two important ways. First, it provides a new perspective on understanding the influence of POP on employee performance. Despite much current research on the variables moderating the relationship between POP and employee outcomes (Ellen *et al.*, 2022b; Hochwarter *et al.*, 2022; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2022), explanations of this phenomenon are still incomplete. This study offers a unique contribution to the field of organisational politics research by demonstrating that the negative effects of POP occur mainly when employees also experience negative behaviours from superiors that increase both stress levels and intensify levels of organisational politicking. In situations where direct supervisors do not exhibit destructive behaviours and employees have access to support, POP has been shown to be a variable that does not negatively impact the employee performance.

Second, this study provides insight into the balance role of organisational resources between hindrance stressors and employee outcomes. Previously, it has been shown that the resources available to employees can counterbalance to some extent the negative impact of POP on employee outcomes (Naseer *et al.*, 2018; Al-Abrow, 2022). However, the role of resources has not been clarified either in relation to employee performance or in situations of stressor accumulation (including abusive supervision). The present research fills this gap by showing that POS plays a protective function against organisational stressors.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Perception of organisational politics and job performance

The issue of politics in the professional environment can be considered from many perspectives, but the most pervasive of these is *political outcomes*. Political outcomes represent manifestations of political characteristics and actions (Ferris *et al.*, 2019). The most commonly researched topic in this area is POP. POP is typically treated as a catalyst model for examining antecedents and outcomes of observed political behaviours in organisations (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2020). These acts are frequently perceived as being associated with the manipulation of organisational policies and often include coercive tactics, even at the expense of others for short-term gains.

As an antecedent to workplace outcomes, POP has generally been recognised as a hindrance stressor with a detrimental impact on employee performance (Chang *et al.*, 2009; Bedi and Schat, 2013). POP have the potential to create frustrating work environments that are fertile for conflict and aggression, thereby draining employees' coping resources and possibly leading them to experience strain (Crawford *et al.*, 2010; Rosen and Levy, 2013; Meisler *et al.*, 2019). However, this is most often the case in situations with high levels of POP. Low levels of POP, like other organisational stressors (e.g. organisational constraints), can have a stimulating and mobilising effect on employees' behaviours (Ellen *et al.*, 2022b; Hochwarter *et al.*, 2022).

According to the JD-R theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), POP can be described as *hindering job demands* (Bedi and Schat, 2013). Job demands refer to those physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that require either sustained physical or psychological (cognitive and emotional) efforts or both, and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs. The JD-R theory offers precise explanations of the mechanism behind the relationship between POP and performance. High-demand situations deplete the energy of employees and lower their psychological and physical condition (i.e. impair health), resulting in a lower level of professional performance. Following such a theoretical assumption, the demands associated with POP have been found to have meaningful linear relationships with a number of affective, cognitive and behavioural employee outcomes (Ferris *et al.*, 2019; Hochwarter *et al.*, 2020).

H1. POP is directly and negatively related to job performance.

Mediating role of job satisfaction between POP and employee performance

The general assumption that POP represents strain-inducing stressors and undermines employees' performance has been validated in previous research; however, based on both the theoretical framework (the JD-R theory) and recent studies, this impact can also be indirect, through attitudes. Attitudes play a crucial role in explaining professional outcomes (Riketta, 2008). It is, therefore, not surprising that work attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction) are the most frequently examined outcomes of organisational politics (Miller *et al.*, 2008; Bedi and Schat, 2013; Ellen *et al.*, 2022b). Several other studies (Chang *et al.*, 2009; Rosen and Levy, 2013) also show that work attitudes fully or partially mediate the effects of POP on employee performance. To justify the mediating role of job satisfaction between POP and employee performance, employees' attitudes must reflect a predisposition to respond either positively or negatively to a perceived situation (Riketta, 2008). Rosen *et al.* (2009) show that the emotional reaction to the phenomenon of politics negatively affects employees' attitudes and that to manage the politicised environment, employees may feel compelled to engage in impression management tactics to distract them from their job-related duties. Such actions undermine their job satisfaction. This path of relationships between variables has been confirmed in several meta-analyses (e.g. Crawford *et al.*, 2010). As a result, decrease in job satisfaction also results in lower employee performance. Confirmation for this mechanism explaining the phenomenon in JD-R theory in question was presented by Roczniawska *et al.* (2022). Based on a systematic review of existing studies, they showed that escalating demands not only result in negative effects on strain, but there is a reduction in job satisfaction that leads to a reduction in employee performance (in-role and extra-role behaviours).

H2. Job satisfaction mediates between POP and job performance.

Moderating role of abusive supervision between POP and job performance

The JD-R theory indicates that the behaviours of leaders indirectly affect employees' attitudes and performance. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) show that leaders can create abundant job resources for their followers or reinforce existing resources (Tummers and Bakker, 2021). Alternatively, using destructive behaviours, leaders can contribute to reducing these resources and intensifying job demands (Whitman *et al.*, 2014). In particular, employees who work for abusive leaders may experience significant fear about their current and future career prospects, sense that their work contributions are not appreciated or seek to protect themselves rather than find ways to contribute to their employer's success (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the motivation to work decreases, and employees' performances deteriorate.

Prior research examining the abusive supervision–employee outcomes relationship suggests that perceived supervisory abuse increases the likelihood of experiencing psychological strain and lowering affective well-being. The abuse depletes the necessary resources to cope with the mistreatment, subsequently causing negative attitudes and lowered performance. Moreover, they are compelled to conserve their remaining resources and experience increased stress, leading to dysfunctional behaviours at work (Mackey *et al.*, 2017).

The relationship among abusive supervision, POP and individual outcomes can be explained as follows: if employees operate in a professional environment characterised by high organisational politics, the destructive influence of the leaders may increase hindering demands and reduce professional outcomes. Martinko *et al.* (2013) review the research on this phenomenon, pointing out that perceptions of abusive supervision are linked with organisational injustice, conflicts and organisational stress. Tepper *et al.* (2012) indicate that abusive supervision captures politically motivated behaviour; it is suggested that abuse may be viewed as a distinguishable form of interpersonal influence that managers use to accomplish various strategic objectives. Thus, in a highly politicised work environment, the hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours of leaders (Tepper, 2000) may have a harmful effect

on employees' attitudes and behaviours. In fact, the creation of such a hostile environment by leaders might facilitate and even legitimise the use of unethical behaviours and contribute to the deterioration of the organisational climate by increasing the level of politics in the organisation (Ferris *et al.*, 2019).

Despite efforts to integrate organisational politics and leadership in the few studies that sought to link leadership to POP (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007; Naseer *et al.*, 2016; Liu and Liu, 2018; Ejaz *et al.*, 2021; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2022), research conceptualising dysfunctional leadership types as a contextual factor exacerbating the harmful effects of POP is lacking. Most research to date focuses on explaining the influence of leadership on employees' attitudes and behaviours, and these studies treat POP as a moderator, not a predictor. Nonetheless, the research quite clearly shows that in situations involving high POP and high abusive supervision, employees report lower levels of satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviours and creativity (Naseer *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, it is possible that employees who perceive highly political environments and additionally experience abusive leaders will experience lower job satisfaction as well as achieve lower professional outcomes.

H3a. Abusive supervision moderates the relationship between POP and job satisfaction such that the negative relationship is stronger when abusive supervision is high rather than low.

H3b. Abusive supervision moderates the indirect effect of POP on job performance such that the negative relationship is stronger when abusive supervision is high rather than low.

Moderating role of perceived organisational support among POP, abusive supervision and job performance

According to the JD-R theory, the quantity and quality of resources available to employees both reduce (buffer) the harmful effects of job demands, translating into improved employee outcomes through increased motivation (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Among the many resources important in counteracting stress factors, POS plays a special role. POS is treated as a resource (Byrne *et al.*, 2005; Naseer *et al.*, 2018; Al-Abrow, 2022), because it is an implicit promise that the organisation will provide socio-emotional support to the employee for conducting their job and assist with stressful circumstances (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2020).

As opposed to physical resources or working conditions, POS is not a stable and tangible element. POS strongly depends on employees' attributions of the organisation's intent, which depend on their receipt of either favourable or unfavourable treatment (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2020). According to the organisational support theory (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2020), an organisation is committed to satisfying its employees' requirements, such as their social, emotional and financial needs. These can be assessed by employees' leveraging of the organisational climate, leadership and working conditions. Therefore, when employees feel that the organisation meets their needs and cares for their well-being, they cultivate the belief that they can count on the organisation in difficult situations. Thus, perceived support can be defined as the employees' overall impression regarding the extent to which their organisation considers their contributions and efforts. Positive perception of an organisation triggers a readiness to reciprocate the employer's actions with increased commitment and improved work results (Shanock and Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017).

The moderating role of POS among abusive supervision, POP and employee performance is not completely obvious. POP and POS are clearly related and constitute part of the "social setting" of work organisations (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997). Some authors even propose that POP and POS may be opposite poles of the same phenomenon. However, recent studies tend to

emphasise that they are two distinct constructs (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017). For instance, POP focuses on employee perceptions of how the work environment influences themselves and others, whereas POS emphasises how the organisation directly supports and appreciates the focal individual.

Despite the doubts outlined above, treating POS as a moderator is grounded in solid logic. As indicated by Eisenberger *et al.* (2020), through its socio-emotional need-fulfilling function, POS may change the strength of the relationship between stressors and strains. For example, Byrne *et al.* (2005) find that POS interacts with POP in relation to employees' depressed moods at work. Naseer *et al.* (2018) show that POS counterbalance the bullying–performance relationships. Moreover, Al-Abrrow (2022) demonstrates that POS buffers the negative impact of POP on organisational silence.

The moderating role of POS can be attributed to the fact that when employees feel supported by the organisation, they show higher positive job attitudes and become more willing to promote the overall goals of the organisation, even when they perceive the organisation as politicised or they have abusive supervisors. The key point here is that achieving good job outcomes is the consequence of high resources, which buffer the negative effect of hindrance stressors, therefore:

- H4a.* POS influences the moderating effect of abusive supervision on the relationship between POP and job satisfaction by strengthening the moderating effect among employees with higher POS than those with lower POS.
- H4b.* POS influences the moderating effect of abusive supervision on the relationship between POP and job performance by strengthening the moderating effect among employees with high job satisfaction and higher POS rather than those with lower POS.

Method

Sampling and research procedure

This research was conducted from March 2018 to October 2018 and used the computer-assisted telephone interview method. Questionnaires in Polish were used in the study, having undergone the process of cultural adaptation (back translation, corrections for words and meanings). The study involved 408 companies from diverse sectors operating in Poland. The following procedure was used to select the survey respondents. Initially, the human resources (HR) departments of the organisations were contacted by telephone. Subsequently, the HR employees indicated persons in dyad suitable for the survey (employee and co-worker). The employees answered questions about POP, abusive supervision, POS and job satisfaction. A co-worker from the same department assessed the employee's performance.

Each company was represented by an employee occupying a specialist position ($N = 408$) and their co-workers ($N = 408$). Respondents from the specialist group were not informed that they would be assessed by their co-workers. The following criteria were applied to select the specialists: completed at least secondary education and possesses at least 5 years of professional experience following a one-year internship experience in the current company. Moreover, it was important that they perform specialised professional duties. These selection criteria were established to avoid large differences in competencies between individual respondents and ensure the homogeneity of the studied population.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the employee sample were as follows, 5% of the subjects worked at corporations comprising over 1,000 employees, while 21 and 74% belonged to large- (251–1,000 employees) and middle-sized (51–250 employees) companies, respectively. The sample was dominated by university-educated individuals (85%). Females comprised 62% of the sample. The majority of the sample was composed of

respondents aged 36–45 years (40%), followed by those aged 46–55 years (24%). In terms of tenure, 41 and 21% of the subjects reported having worked for 11–20 years and over 20 years, respectively.

Measures

This study expressed all measures via a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree/never and 7 = strongly agree/always.

Perceived organisational politics (POP) was measured with the 13-item tool *Perceptions of Politics Scale* developed by [Kacmar and Carlson \(1997\)](#).

Abusive supervision (AS) was measured with the 15-item tool *Abusive Supervision Measure* developed by [Tepper \(2000\)](#).

Job satisfaction (JS) was measured with the 3-item tool *Michigan Organisational Assessment Questionnaire – Job Satisfaction Subscale* ([Cammann et al., 1983](#)).

Perceived organisational support (POS) was measured using the 8-item questionnaire developed by [Eisenberger et al. \(1986\)](#). The shortened version of this POS questionnaire has been widely used in previous studies and has demonstrated strong psychometric validity (e.g. [Hochwarter et al., 2003](#)).

Job performance (JP) was measured using the modified 25-item *Individual Work Performance Questionnaire* developed by [Koopmans \(2014\)](#) to diagnose 4 dimensions of employee performance (task performance, organisational citizenship behaviours, adaptive performance and counterproductive work behaviours). The modification involved including 7 items about adaptive performance developed by [Pulakos et al. \(2000\)](#).

While selecting the control variables, I followed the recommendations offered by [Ellen et al. \(2022b\)](#). I considered the following control variables: gender, age, education and tenure.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The results of the inter-correlations and the descriptive statistics are presented in [Table 1](#). Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software (ver. 25).

Measurement models

To test the research hypotheses, a series of nested models were studied. AMOS software (ver. 25) was used to verify the research models. This study used a baseline (five-factor) model and

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job performance	5.82	0.57	(0.86)							
2. Perceptions of organisational politics	2.87	1.38	-0.173**	(0.94)						
3. Job satisfaction	6.35	0.88	0.345**	-0.526**	(0.85)					
4. Abusive supervision	1.17	0.43	-0.102**	0.480**	-0.363**	(0.89)				
5. Perceived organisational support	4.35	1.06	0.405**	-0.686**	0.492**	-0.419**	(0.89)			
6. Gender	1.28	0.44	-0.257**	-0.006	-0.125**	0.023	-0.51			
7. Age	2.83	1.04	0.010	0.147**	0.050	0.079*	-0.090*	-0.051		
8. Tenure	2.74	1.34	-0.111**	0.096*	0.039	0.055	-0.077*	0.049	0.618**	
9. Education	1.75	0.44	-0.125**	-0.002	-0.043	-0.113**	-0.147**	0.013	-0.297**	-0.191**

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations

Note(s): In brackets, reliability Cronbach's; Gender: 1 – females males, 2 – males; $N = 408$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

estimated all the theorised relationships between the stated constructs. The measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (Kline, 2011), which comprised five latent variables. The values of these fit indices ($\chi^2 = 1725.368$, $df = 894$; $p = 0.033$; RMSEA = 0.065; CFI = 0.962; TLI = 0.942; SRMR = 0.055) indicated that the measurement model provided the best fit to the data.

Hypotheses testing

Regression-based analysis in SPSS PROCESS macro (ver. 3.5) using the recommended 5,000 bootstrap sampling with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) (Hayes, 2018) was employed to test the proposed relationships. The results are depicted in Table 2. As per Hypotheses 1, POP should be significantly and negatively related to employee performance. The results demonstrate that after including the control variables, employees who perceive higher POP have relatively higher performance ($\beta = 0.107$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, Hypotheses 1 is not supported.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that job satisfaction mediates between POP and performance. As shown in Table 2, POP decreases job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.207$, $p < 0.001$), and job satisfaction affects employee performance positively ($\beta = 0.159$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect between these variables was assessed for $\beta = -0.061$ (95% CI = -0.112 to -0.006). Thus, Hypotheses 2 is supported.

	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
	Mediator variable: Job satisfaction			Dependent variable: Job performance		
Constant	6.348	0.282	22.415***	5.157	0.424	12.001***
Gender	-0.204	0.114	-1.829	-0.256	0.076	-3.374***
Age	0.094	0.064	1.898	0.033	0.041	0.086
Tenure	0.003	0.049	0.066	-0.063	0.032	-1.945
Education	0.031	0.159	0.284	-0.040	0.087	-0.447
Perceptions of organisational politics (POP)	-0.207	0.039	-3.369***	0.107	0.045	2.378*
Abusive supervision (AS)	-0.197	0.233	-0.846	-0.714	0.335	-2.130*
Perceived organisational support (POS)	0.239	0.068	3.495***	0.189	0.064	2.962**
Job satisfaction				0.159	0.055	2.839**
POP×AS	-0.374	0.159	-2.343*	0.247	0.152	1.626
POP×AP×POS	-0.163	0.063	-2.603**	0.121	0.038	2.019*
Test of conditional POPxAS interaction at values of POS						
-1 SD	-0.201			-0.025		
0	-0.374*			0.116		
+1 SD	-0.547**			0.224*		
Indirect effect of job satisfaction				-0.061	0.031	95% CI (-0.112; -0.006)
Index of moderated-moderated mediation				-0.036	0.018	95% CI (-0.071; -0.001)
Index of conditional moderated-moderated mediation						95% CI
-1 SD				-0.032	0.036	-0.103; 0.038
0				-0.059	0.038	-0.133; 0.015
+1 SD				-0.092	0.045	-0.180; -0.004
R^2		0.41			0.38	
F		9.333 (12; 395)***			7.729 (12; 395)***	

Table 2.
Effect on job performance

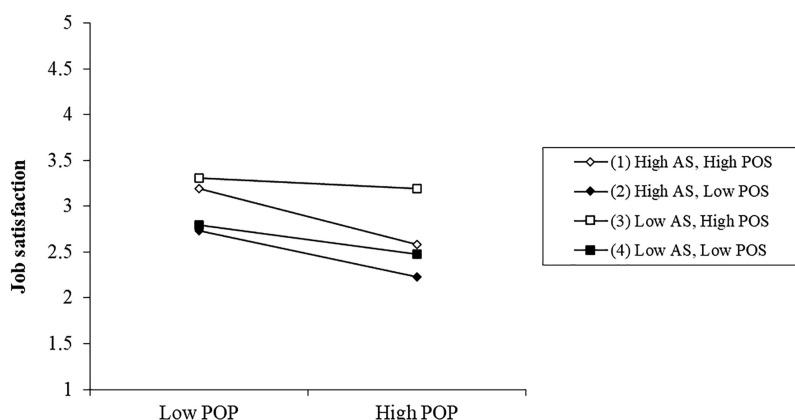
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Hypothesis 3a predicts a moderating effect of abusive supervision on the relationship between POP and job satisfaction. **Hypothesis 3b** predicts a moderating effect of abusive supervision between POP and employee performance. As shown in **Table 2**, POP \times AS significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.374, p < 0.001$), while the same interaction was positively and non-significantly related to employee performance ($\beta = 0.247, n.s.$). Thus, **Hypotheses 3a** receives empirical support while **Hypothesis 3b** is not confirmed. These results may seem surprising and inconsistent. They indicate that in situations with high abusive supervision and high POP, a decrease in job satisfaction as well as an increase in employee performance is observed. This inconsistency arises only because the last tested variable, POS, has not been considered.

The last hypothesis predicts the moderating effect of POS on abusive supervision moderation pertaining to the relationships between POP and job satisfaction (**Hypothesis 4a**) and between POP and employee performance (**Hypothesis 4b**). As shown, POP \times AS \times POS significantly and negatively predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.163, p < 0.01$). To better interpret the interactional pattern, simple slope analyses (one standard deviation above and below the mean) were conducted. The results of this test show that POP \times AS was negatively related to job satisfaction when POS was high (+1SD, $\beta = -0.547, p < 0.01$) rather than low (-1SD, $\beta = -0.201, p = 0.204, n.s.$). **Figure 1** shows a graphical representation of the three-way interaction for job satisfaction.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the decline in job satisfaction as a result of POP occurs both when employees have destructive leaders and do not perceive organisational support. However, when employees' POS is high and they experience a low level of abusive supervision, POP will not affect their job satisfaction. Thus, **Hypotheses 4a** is empirically supported.

Hypothesis 4b predicts that POS may moderate the moderation effect of abusive supervision between POP and employee performance. It was assumed that when POS is high and abusive supervision is low, employees perceive that organisation politics will not change their performance. As shown in **Table 2**, POP \times AS \times POS significantly and positively influenced performance ($\beta = 0.121, p < 0.05$). The results of the simple slope test showed that POP \times AS was negatively related to job performance when POS was high (+1SD, $\beta = 0.224, p < 0.05$) rather than low. Thus, **Hypotheses 4b** is supported. A graphical representation of the results is described in **Figure 2**.



Note(s): POP – Perceptions of Organisational Politics; AS – Abusive Supervision; POS – Perceived Organisational Support

Figure 1. Three-way interaction between perceptions of organisational politics and job satisfaction

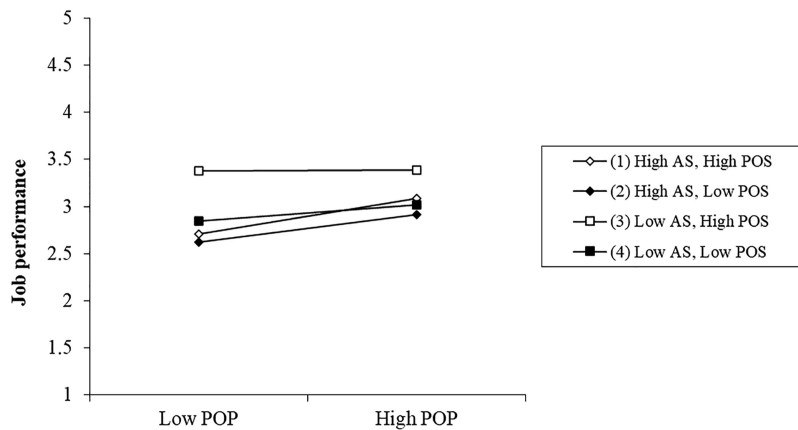


Figure 2.
Three-way interaction
between perceptions of
organisational politics
and job performance

Note(s): POP – Perceptions of Organisational Politics; AS – Abusive Supervision;
POS – Perceived Organisational Support

Finally, the three-way moderation–mediation between POP and job performance was tested. As shown in [Table 2](#), the index of conditional moderation–mediation was significant ($\beta = -0.036$; 95% CI = -0.071 to -0.001), suggesting that POS influenced the mediatory role of job satisfaction on employee performance. The results of the simple slope test show that POP \times AS \times POS was negatively related to employee performance when POS was high (+1SD, $\beta = -0.092$, 95% CI = -0.180 to -0.004). This finding can be explained as follows: employees who perceive low abusive supervision and POP as well high POS show higher job satisfaction, which influences employee performance. However, in certain situations (low abusive supervision and high POS), high POP does not have a destructive effect on employee performance. Job performance remains unchanged regardless of the level of organisational politics.

Discussion

Today's global workplace is faced with numerous challenges which may give rise to organisational politics, posing a serious threat not only to individuals but also to the survival and effective functioning of the organisation ([Hochwarter et al., 2020](#)). Despite conducting many studies into the causes and effects of organisational politics (e.g. [Miller et al., 2008](#); [Chang et al., 2009](#)), a conclusive understanding about the situations in which politics does not cause negative consequences for employees' attitudes and behaviours remains elusive ([Maher et al., 2021](#)). In response to this issue, this study applied the JD-R theory to examine the moderating and mediating effects of abusive supervision, POS and job satisfaction on the relationship between POP and employee performance. In general, in the study were found indirect (via job satisfaction) and three-way effects of POP, abusive supervision and POS in predicting employee performance, such that POP attenuates employee performance only for individuals with low abusive supervision and high organisational support.

Theoretical implications

The study makes important contributions to the existing body of research. First, it shows that perceiving organisational politics in a direct way does not trigger lower professional effects; this is only possible under specific conditions or contexts ([Ferris et al., 2019](#); [Hochwarter et al.,](#)

2020; Maher *et al.*, 2021). This study also shows that the accumulation of hindrance stressors combined with a lack of resources needed to perform the work, triggering negative emotional reactions, resulting in their final withdrawal of readiness to manifest performance.

Second, this study extends the literature on organisational politics by incorporating abusive supervision research and indicates one of the possible ways to link these variables. Going beyond the theoretical perspectives used in prior research, the results of this work show that abusive supervision has important implications for understanding the influence of organisational politics on employees' outcomes. When employees perceive that their work environment is "saturated with politics," and their direct superiors use various forms of symbolic violence, strong negative reactions in employee behaviours are observed. One reason for employees reacting negatively to abusive supervision is that they experience a diminished sense of self (e.g. lower self-esteem and depleted ego), which in turn leads to less readiness to search for resources.

The role of the immediate supervisor is, therefore, important in explaining the effects of organisational politics (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007; Naseer *et al.*, 2016; Liu and Liu, 2018; Ejaz *et al.*, 2021). Leaders can either provide support and the necessary resources to employees or deepen the resource depletion process and ultimately contribute to lower their professional effects (Naseer *et al.*, 2016). It seems that a comprehensive understanding of the concept of organisational politics is only possible if the role of leaders is not reduced to the mere function of a predictor; rather, it should constitute an important part of the POP construct. This fact is also pointed out by Ellen *et al.* (2022a), emphasising the need to contextualise POP research in which the role of leaders would be included.

Finally, this study also responds to the postulate of Eisenberger *et al.* (2020, p. 116), who indicated that more research is needed to understand when POS plays a buffering role between job stressors and employee outcomes. Analysis shows that POS has a strong negative connection with POP, which has been indicated in previous research as well (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997). However, POS does not have to be treated only as a result of POP or as a mediator between POP and employee outcomes. Given that it represents employees' perceived access to resources (Byrne *et al.*, 2005; Naseer *et al.*, 2018; Turek, 2021; Al-Abrow, 2022), it may play a moderating role.

Thus far, it can be noticed that the data and presented analysis are consistent with the mechanism described in the JD-R theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Abusive supervision, as demonstrated by Tummers and Bakker (2021) can intensify job demands, thereby contributing to a faster drain on resources and leads to a deterioration of employees' emotional states, which triggers a decline in professional effects. However, access to resources can allow workers to maintain the necessary level of self-regulation and thus reduce the negative effects of organisational politics (Palmer *et al.*, 2020), allowing them to maintain the current level of performance. This finding provides an interesting complement to JD-R studies which show that access to resources can buffer even hindering job stressor as POP.

Taking all the above findings into account, it can be concluded that organisational politics should not be always considered as threat as long as employees have access to organisational resources and supportive leadership in their workplaces. In certain situations and at low intensity, it can even have a stimulating effect on employee performance (Ellen *et al.*, 2022b; Hochwarter *et al.*, 2022).

Practical implications

This research has several practical implications. As the results show, POP is particularly harmful for employees when direct superiors use oppressive forms of leadership. Therefore, first, it is necessary to provide both more support for and control over managers' behaviours. As Qin *et al.* (2018) note, the destructive behaviours of supervisors are

in many cases a consequence of the increasing demands placed on them and the little support they receive from the firm's management. As a result, they escalate violent behaviours in order to maintain – what they believe to be – the best way to control the professional performance of subordinate employees. It is also worth increasing the formal control over the conduct of managers. [Srikanth \(2019\)](#) shows that the formalisation of rules limits the impact of abusive supervision. Therefore, building a transparent HR system and paying attention to the well-being of employees will help tone down the level of politics and the harmful impact of the immediate supervisor. Establishing formal HR practices may be critical to signal the employees that the organisation is a psychologically safe place to work.

Second, some researchers (e.g. [Rosen and Levy, 2013](#)) suggest that developing employees' political skills might neutralise the effects of office politics on their attitudes by improving their ability to cope with, understand and control these politics. As noted by [Takeuchi et al. \(2022\)](#), these skills are particularly beneficial in dealing with POP when employees have good exchange relationships with their supervisors. Moreover, these skills translate into the quality of duties performed and impact the career development of employees ([Munyon et al., 2015](#)). In this respect, training activities or mentoring to raise these types of skills would also be useful.

Finally, organisations should take actions to help employees develop a positive view of the entity they work for, as high levels of POS act as a cushion against politics and abusive supervision. Employees with high POS have sufficient resources and, when faced with hindrance, might not react by reducing job satisfaction. Access to resources (social support, well-being programs, etc.) is, therefore, a key factor for the effective fulfilment of professional duties ([Nielsen et al., 2017](#)).

Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations despite the intriguing findings. First, as a cross-sectional design was used in this study, so it could not infer the cause–effect association between POP and employee performance from the data. The relationships assumed from the research model can be verified conclusively only via experimental research, longitudinal studies or both. Although a longitudinal design is desirable for an empirical analysis of workplace performance outcomes, the presented predictions are grounded in theory, thus offering a useful comparison with the existing evidence.

A second limitation is that this research was based on only one level of data – employees' opinions. Although the job performance assessment was done by co-workers, there is a concern that the results can be biased by organisational politics in the unit. Using multi-source of data and multi-level analyses would enable a better understanding of the relationships among politics, abusive supervision, organisational support, and work-related outcomes between and within employees from different organisations.

Finally, the presented research sample was restricted to employees from various Polish companies, and thus, the findings cannot be simply generalised to other contexts and countries. Although companies in different countries have work characteristics rather similar to those of the contemporary business, the specific cultural context (e.g. high degree of power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and tendency to cynicism and pessimism), together with the political and legal context (e.g. formalism, legal uncertainty) generic to Poland should be considered while making comparisons to results of studies in other countries.

The current research also provides directions for future studies. First, researchers may wish to obtain more comprehensive explanations about the relationship between abusive supervision and organisational politics. For example, antecedents of abusive supervision may relate to supervisors' desire to protect, obtain and keep their power. This is possible

when the organisation is “steeped in politics.” However, the opposite is equally possible, wherein it is assumed that this organisational politicisation is a consequence of supervision activities. Overall, investigating abusive supervision from the political perspective appears worthwhile.

Interesting research avenue involves checking what types of resources available to employees are the most critical in counteracting cumulative destructive organisational phenomena such as organisational politics and abusive supervision. It is, therefore, necessary to move beyond POS and uncover the precise definitions of individual buffering factors.

Moreover, future research should attempt to sharpen the elucidation of the similarities and differences between the tested behaviours. This study used the four-factor job performance model. However, future research should focus on full scales measuring employee behaviours, as the results would probably be more detailed.

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