

Cultural Intelligence and Organizational Politics: An Empirical Quest

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Abstract – This research investigated the association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics. Data were obtained from 57 managers; the data set also underwent a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The study in deploying the inferential statistic tools, utilized the Spearman correlation to investigate the association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics, and a linear regression analysis was also utilized to predict the relationship between the studies' constructs using the IBM SPSS Statistics version 21. The results of the study indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between cultural intelligence and organizational politics [$p (.000) < 0.05, r = .931$]. The significance of the study is established in the empirical credence it has established in quest of the emerging interest of the research theme to both academia and industry.

Keywords – cultural intelligence, organizational politics, resource-base theory

I. Introduction

There is a recurrent need to understand the dynamics of organizational variables and their interplay in advancing organizational goals. This is evidenced in the plethora of literature that has investigated the constructs of cultural intelligence, organizational politics, resource-based theory, etc. (Zica, Goncalves, Martins & Goncalves, 2016; Solomon & Steyn, 2017; Cheong & Kim, 2018; Titov, Birukov & Vichodtseva, 2021). Irrespective of the extant studies, each construct has been examined in view of other organizations' variables, and to the best of the author's view, no study has empirically sought to investigate the association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics, hence, this study sought to fill the gap.

This study addresses the gap in the paucity of research on the association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics. This paper's discourse is centered on the theoretical exploration of the study constructs (i.e. cultural intelligence and organizational politics), and further exploits the resource-based theory in comprehending any association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics. Beyond the theoretical exploit, the study also consolidates its relevance via an analytical process that characterizes quality research (Palmatier, Houston & Hulland, 2018).

The major objective of this research is to reveal empirical credence to the association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics. The paucity of an empirical link to these constructs further reinforces the significance of this study to both academia and industry; hence, the study creates a cogent postulation and builds an advancing theoretical comprehension (Yadav, 2010; King & Lepak, 2011); for a robust understanding of the association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics.

The study is structured as follows; the next segment had a discourse on the literature related to the study constructs, as well as a resource-based theory perspective on the constructs. After that, the methodology segment demonstrates the processes involved in the sample and procedure, measures, and analyses. The result segment outlines and interprets the findings. The discussion segment examined the influence of the results for further comprehension and dynamics of the association between the constructs. The study ends with the conclusion and further study segment.

II. Literature Review

II.I. Cultural Intelligence

The increasing demand for a diversified workforce via the exploration of the virtues of a diversified national ethnicity and globalization has resulted in increased cultural diversity. Amongst the constraint of cultural diversity is the possible conflicting array of misalignment in shared norms and values; which could limit the level of commitment to organizational goals. Hence, theoreticians and industrial practitioners constantly sought a platform to harmonize these divergent cultures and deploy a structure to optimize the virtue of the diverse culture; this resulted in the concept of cultural intelligence (Early & Ang, 2003).

The increasing participation of organizations in the global market landscape has mostly resulted in restructuring their process to accommodate multi-cultural actors (i.e. employees) in their internal affairs. The modern business engagements and processes by

organizations are encumbered with interactions that have enshrined the need to synergize and optimize the engagement of employees who possess diverse cultural attributes; value orientation, beliefs, and norms. The acknowledgment of these cultural attributes has been evident in the plethora of literature that sought to clarify and profile cultural realities in organizations (Hofstede, 1991; Schwartz, 1992; Shweder, 2011). Hence, employees in administering their organizational affairs, consciously or unconsciously navigate the array of cultural difference which is capable of aiding or limiting the actualization of defined goals.

Cultural intelligence has become a strategic resource in optimizing organizational internal protocol and deploying organizations' strategic advantage to their external environment. Cultural intelligence connotes the competence to effectively function in a diversified cultural environment (Early & Ang, 2003; Peterson, 2004; Ang, Dyne & Rockstuhl, 2015). Cultural intelligence further denotes the discernment and competence to comprehend, understand, and effectively communicate with others' cultures to optimize performance (Early & Ang, 2003). Hence, the scope of cultural intelligence is beyond the comprehension of a specific cultural context but denotes the competence to optimally function across a diverse cultural environment. Beyond the operations of cultural dynamics in an organization, cultural intelligence competence harnesses relevant skills in articulating cultural influence in rival firms and the cultural influence of global firms whose activities may have ripple influence in their industry. Optimized engagement of cultural intelligence produces valuable intercultural interaction, hence, a necessity for organizational members and goals in overcoming the threats and weaknesses of cross-cultural interactions (Thomas et al. 2008; Solomon & Steyn, 2017).

While extant literature has given insight into the realities of culture and its attributes in organizations, the comprehension of how employees function optimally in an intercultural work environment has become a recurrent quest for theoreticians and industrial practitioners (Hammer, Gudykunst & Wiseman, 1978; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Holt & Seki, 2012; Ang, Dyne & Rockstuhl, 2015). A further implication of this quest is reflected in the desire by an organization for talent attraction, retention, and skill optimization of an employee who comprehends the dynamics of the work environment and the interplay of subtle cultural influence in the protocol and engagement of organization affairs.

II.II. Organizational Politics

The interplay of politics in organizational affairs is an ever-present reality; this is evident by extant literature and experiential employee encounters in organizational climate (Cheong & Kim, 2018; Miller, Byrne, Rutherford & Hansen, 2009; Vigoda-Gadot & Meisler, 2010; Park & Lee, 2020). The negativity or positivity in the perception of politics by organizational members is a function of their personal experience, benefits, and interpretation of political activities in their organization. Organizational members' experience, benefits, and interpretation of political activities in their organization have the potential of influencing their work engagement (i.e. performance), belief in their organization's mission (i.e. organizational ambassador, turnover), relationship with other organizational members (i.e. superior, colleagues), and workplace environment (i.e. culture). Hence, employees are probably reinforced to engage in political behaviours when other employees seem to benefit and advance through political activities.

The conceptualization of organizational politics has not gained a universal connotation (Cheong & Kim, 2018; (Miller, Byrne, Rutherford & Hansen, 2009; Park & Lee, 2020). Regardless of the plethora of connotation that has been attributed to organizational politics, its central theme is anchored on its expression as a tool for exploring social influence, self-interest, and advantageous positioning in a social context (i.e. organization), which usually does not advance organizational goals.

The antecedents that have spurred the rise of organizational politics over time have been attributed to certain variables (Vigoda-Gadot & Cohen, 2002; Im, 2014; Park & Lee, 2020). First, is the absence of policies and rules to coordinate organizational affairs; employees are naturally embodied with interest that seeks expression and is more audacious in becoming a reality where policies and rules are absent. This employee's interest can be judged as a self-interest with regards to its level of alignment or misalignment with the organization's interest. This individual employee interest seeks to impose a default informal policy and rule that project interest which may advance the broad organizational goal and/or individual employee interest. Also, when management lacks the right competence in navigating, analyzing, and interpreting uncertain, volatile, unpredictable, and turbulent environments, the influence of politics in organizational affairs begins to gain dominance. Likewise, the lobbying, apportionment, harnessing, and utilization of relevant scarce resources (i.e. funds, equipment, authority, positions, etc.) raises the deployment of political skills and activities in organizations as organizational members' competes for these scarce resources. More so, a conflict that is attributed to confronting divergent interests is observed to advance the interplay of political practices for the affected parties in the organization, and the feature or approach (i.e. compromise, accommodation, confrontation, avoidance, collaboration) that each party displays or adapt to handling the conflict situation can be adjudged an organizational political act if the interest was geared at advancing self-interest. Finally, organizational management may unconsciously promote cultures that advance political activities; this is mostly reflected in the policies and systems of rewards, promotions, and allocations of privileges in the workplace. These policies and systems primarily recognize and seek to reward individual efforts as against team efforts; which influence the engagement of political means to attain organizational goals and the subsequent benefits that follow, influence organizational non-political actors to participate in organizational politics to also attain such benefits.

The subtlety of organizational politics is capable of influencing processes (i.e. structure, reward, culture, social dynamics, and decisions) and may negatively or positively affect an organization with regard to the degree to which the political intent aligns with the organizational goal.

II.III. Resource-Based Theory

The resource-based theory is an economic construct that articulates organizational performance as a function of an organization's distinctiveness in administering and harnessing its internal capabilities and features. Hence, sustained market advantage connotes uniqueness in organizations' capabilities that possess more advantages than competitors' capabilities. Organizations are increasingly becoming global with regard to diversified employee and client-service value propositions; this globalized reality is strongly influenced by advancements in technology, communication, legal and regulatory policies, integrated financial infrastructure, and uneven geographical market resource endowments (Zica et al., 2016). The influencing factors amongst other variables recurrently create an environment that is relatively stable, dynamic, complex, and unpredictable, hence capable of influencing employee behaviour (i.e. politically), organizations that can effectively respond or react to this variable in their quest to optimize their organizational goals must possess internally optimized tangible and intangible (i.e. cultural intelligence) resources that must be strategically deployed in harnessing opportunities and manipulating threats.

Organizational management is instrumental in the advancement of a culture that prioritizes the adoption of a learning environment which promotes cultural intelligence as a tool for moderating the influence of environmental (i.e. internal and external) variables on employee political activities amongst others. Nonetheless, for cultural intelligence to strive as an indispensable resource in optimizing organizational goals irrespective of the presence of organizational politics, it must possess certain elements as attributed by the resource-based theory; valuable, inimitable, non-substitutable, rare, and organization (Barney, 1991; 2007; Penrose, 2009).

The amalgamation of these attributes; valuable (distinct organizational capabilities and features), inimitable (distinct organizational capabilities and features that an organization has a monopoly of), non-substitutable (distinct organizational capabilities and features whose equivalent cannot be reproduced by competitors), rare (distinct organizational capabilities and features that are not common or only possessed by one or few firms in the industry), and organization (organizations policies, structures, procedures that support the administration of the distinct organizational capabilities and features) when harnessed in cultural intelligence uniquely consolidates the internal advantages on which an organization can leverage to advance their interest via the exploration of opportunities and manipulation of threats that may be relatively impressed by organizational political activities. Hence, an organization with optimized resource-based attributes should heighten performance in the advancement of its goals when compared with firms without optimized resource-based attributes (Barney, 1991). The level of harnessing of organizational internal resources; tangible and intangible (i.e. cultural intelligence) influences organizations' strengths or weaknesses, hence their capabilities in understanding influences of organizations' politics and strategically communicating to optimize organizational goals, and this distinguishes the performance of an organization from another.

III. Methodology

III.I. Sample and Procedure

The study adopted a convenience sampling technique in administering the questionnaire to 57 managers who participated in an executive business class. Streamlining this respondent set limited possible response bias that may result from workplace environmental interactions (Spector, 2006). The response rate was 100% (57 respondents) and the questionnaires were complete and usable.

III.II. Measures

Constructs measurement was scaled at a 5-point Likert scale that begins from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Cultural intelligence. In this study, the examinees were directed to select the observed reality of "cultural intelligence" in their organization on a 20-item Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) adopted from the study of Ang, et al. (2007).

Organizational politics. In this study, the examinees were directed to select the observed reality of "organizational politics" in their organization on a 15-item organizational politics scale adopted from the study of Kacmar and Carlson, (1997).

III.III. Analysis

The questionnaire reflects the holistic facets of the constructs being studied and it underwent content validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilized to establish the instruments' reliability. The study utilized inferential statistics, specifically Spearman correlation in denoting the association, direction, and strength of the constructs. A linear regression analysis was likewise adopted

to predict the constructs' relationship. The above was conducted because the data set meets the assumption for their adoption. The data analyses were displayed via tables, and the decision rule was to reject the null hypothesis if the p-value is less than 0.05 (i.e. $p < 0.05$); do not reject the null hypothesis if otherwise.

IV. Results

Table 1 illustrates Cronbach's alpha of "cultural intelligence" $\alpha = .899$, and that of "organizational politics" $\alpha = .875$, which demonstrates that the internal consistency of the scales was high, hence reliable in obtaining the essence of the construct. Table 2 illustrates the result of the Spearman correlation between cultural intelligence and organizational politics; from the result in Table 2, it is empirically evident that cultural intelligence and organizational politics possess a strong positive association ($r = .859$), and a significant positive association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics [$p (.000) < 0.05$]. To predict the relationship and degree of variance in organizational politics that may be explained by cultural intelligence, the study conducted a simple linear regression analysis, as shown in Table 3, 86.6% of the variability in organizational politics can be explained by the actions of cultural intelligence; this is also reinforced by the fact that since $p (.000) < 0.05$, $r = .931$ there is a significant positive relationship between cultural intelligence and organizational politics.

Table 1: Reliability result for cultural intelligence and organizational politics

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Cultural intelligence	.899
Organizational politics	.875

Table 2: Spearman's correlation results for cultural intelligence and organizational politics
($n = 57$)

Construct	Category	Cultural Intelligence	Organizational Politics
Cultural Intelligence	Spearman's rho	1.000	.859**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.	.000
	<i>N</i>	57	57
Organizational Politics	Spearman's rho	.859**	1.000
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.
	<i>N</i>	57	57

Table 3: Linear regression analysis results, where cultural intelligence is the independent variable, and organizational politics is the dependent variable

Variable	Cultural Intelligence					
	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	β	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
Organizational Politics	.931	.866	356.549	.961	18.883	.000

R, R-value; *R*², R-squared value; *F*, F-value; β , beta-value; *P*, significance.

V. Discussion

The present study is anchored on examining the influence of cultural intelligence on organizational politics; the implication of the result to its theoretical and empirical analysis is further discussed below.

Culture via its elements (norms, values, beliefs, etc) is a primary or major influence on the behaviour, attitude, perception, and interest of organizational members and their interpretation, reaction, and response to their environment (i.e. workplace) and other persons (i.e. organizational members) activities (i.e. political).

The attainment and deployment of cultural intelligence (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral cultural intelligence) connotes the potency of a higher strategic experiential knowledge that may be utilized in asserting political influence, behaviour, attitude, and at the same time interpreting, reacting, and responding to organizational members political activities.

The significant association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics [$p (.000) < 0.05, r = .859$] posits that the optimal harnessing of individual employee interest irrespective of its level of alignment to the organizational interest via political activities is mainly a function [$p (.000) < 0.05, r = .931$] of optimizing cultural intelligence; possessed and engaged by the organizational members. Cultural intelligence grants exposure to understanding the peculiarity of individual employees' bias, and can coordinate routes (i.e. political behaviours) to effectively achieve organizational or personal interest.

Cultural intelligence gives a stable and grounded perspective to understanding political activities and possibly utilizing it as a tool that is a necessity for furthering certain interests or goals that might be self-serving, organizational oriented, or both. Cultural intelligence promotes cohesion and encourages clarity in purpose. This is capable of influencing the deployment of organizational politics to activities that have a positive influence on the advancement of organizational goals. Cultural intelligence lessens tension and toxicity in the administration of political behaviour in the workplace.

Cultural intelligence deescalates the notoriety of organizational politics, as it promotes a healthy comprehension of political activities and prompts effective decision-making that majorly advances the organization's strategic objectives.

VI. Conclusion and Further Study

The study investigated the association between cultural intelligence and organizational politics, and found a strong positive association ($r = .859$) between the constructs, as well as a significant influencing relationship; as organizational politics can be explained by the actions of cultural intelligence ($r = .931$). Organizations in exploring the virtue of these finding can institute an active learning culture where cultural intelligence would be taught and encouraged as an effective strategic resource, which is capable of influencing the deployment of organization politics to activities that has a positive influence on the advancement of organizational goals.

While the present study has laid a firm foundation on the association between the constructs examined, further studies are required in giving more strategic insight into this association; such studies could explore other empirical tools in evaluating the relationship between the constructs as well as explore the peculiarities of the constructs in other geographies.

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APPENDIX I

The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)

From each statement, choose the response that best captures your capabilities (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Cultural Intelligence Factor Questionnaire Items

Metacognitive CQ

- MC1 I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.
- MC2 I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
- MC3 I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions.
- MC4 I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.

Cognitive CQ

- COG1 I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures.
- COG2 I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.
- COG3 I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.
- COG4 I know the marriage systems of other cultures.
- COG5 I know the arts and crafts of other cultures.
- COG6 I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.

Motivational CQ

- MOT1 I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
- MOT2 I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
- MOT3 I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.
- MOT4 I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.
- MOT5 I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture.

Behavioral CQ

- BEH1 I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.
- BEH2 I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.
- BEH3 I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
- BEH4 I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
- BEH5 I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

APPENDIX 2

Organizational Politics Scale (OPS)

From each statement, choose the response that best captures your experience (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

Organizational Politics Factor Questionnaire Items

General Political Behavior

- GPB1 People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down.
GPB2 There has always been an influential group in this department that no one ever crosses.

Go Along to Get Ahead

- GAG1 Employees are encouraged to speak out frankly even when they are critical of well-established ideas.
GAG2 There is no place for yes-men around here; good ideas are desired even if it means disagreeing with superiors.
GAG3 Agreeing with powerful others is the best alternative in this organization.
GAG4 It is best not to rock the boat in this organization.
GAG5 Sometimes it is easier to remain quiet than to fight the system.
GAG6 Telling others what they want to hear is sometimes better than telling the truth.
GAG7 It is safer to think what you are told than to make up your own mind.

Pay and Promotion Policies

- PPP1 Since I have worked in this department, I have never seen the pay and promotion policies applied politically.
PPP2 I can't remember when a person received a pay increase or promotion that was inconsistent with the published policies.
PPP3 None of the raises I have received are consistent with the policies on how raises should be determined.
PPP4 The stated pay and promotion policies have nothing to do with how pay raises and promotions are determined.
PPP5 When it comes to pay raise and promotion decisions, policies are irrelevant.
PPP6 Promotions around here are not valued much because how they are determined is so political.