Organizational Politics and its Impact on Performance and Deviance Through Authenticity and Emotional Exhaustion

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We used a multi-method approach (i.e. multi-source survey and two experiments) to investigate the mediating mechanisms that link two distinct facets of organizational politics to employee performance and deviance. Study 1 surveyed 132 employees and their direct supervisors working in a call centre. We found that authenticity mediated the effect of general politics on supervisor-rated performance and that emotional exhaustion mediated the effect of pay and promotion politics on supervisor-rated deviance. To address causality concerns from Study 1, Study 2 adopted an experimental design to test the impact of high/low general political behaviour on authenticity and task performance. Authenticity mediated the effect of general politics on task performance. In Study 3, we used a similar experimental design to test if high/low perceptions of politics that are related to pay and promotion influence emotional exhaustion and deviance. Subjects in the condition depicting high politics in pay and promotion reported the highest levels of emotional exhaustion, and emotional exhaustion mediated the effects of pay and promotion politics on deviance. Overall, our findings suggest that distinctive types of perceived political behaviours at work influence individuals in negative ways, eventually inducing employees to lower their performance and engage in deviant practices.

Introduction

Organizations are political in their very nature (Buchanan, 1999). Perceptions of organizational politics (POPS) are employees' subjective evaluations of the extent to which co-workers and supervisors are engaged in self-serving behaviours

without consideration for others (Ferris *et al.*, 2012; Kacmar and Baron, 1999). In other words, they are the actual perceptions of what organizational members consider political (Vredenburgh and Maurer, 1984). POPS are important because they often negatively influence a series of work behaviours and attitudes, such as employee citizenship behaviours (Bodla, Aiza and Danish, 2014; Kacmar *et al.*, 2011), retention (Andrews, Witt and Kacmar, 2003), job satisfaction (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2003) and organizational commitment (Kimura, 2013; Olson, Bao and Parayitam, 2014). Despite the important consequences of POPS, research investigating their effects on important employee outcomes, such as performance and deviance, has found conflicting results. While a meta-analysis on this topic by Miller, Rutherford and Kolodinsky

(2008) found no significant relationship between POPS and employee performance, a meta-analysis by Ferris et al. (2012) reported that five out of nine studies supported the POPS–performance link.

In this paper, we propose that these conflicting results could be explained by (a) the multidimensionality of the POPS construct and (b) the mediating mechanisms that translate the effects of POPS into employee performance and deviance. Regarding POPS' multidimensionality, although Ferris and Kacmar (1989) originally proposed a one-dimensional construct of POPS, perceptions of politics have often been assumed to have multiple dimensions, such as: (a) general political behaviour; (b) going along to get ahead; and (c) pay and promotion (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991). More generally, Kacmar and Ferris (1997) described organizational politics from two different perspectives: one dealing with individual actions (self-serving behaviours to get ahead, whether by action or inaction) and the other involving organizational decisions (politics influencing organizational policies). Yet, few studies have attempted to understand these different dimensions and how they affect employee behaviour (Byrne, 2005; Fedor et al., 1998). Furthermore, previous studies have found that the incidence of different types of POPS might vary depending on the workplace context investigated (Chang, Rosen and Levy, 2009). We address these limitations by exploring the multidimensional nature and consequences of POPS in call centres.[1]

Call centres involve a mass production approach to customer service (Cameron, 2000) and high task routinization (Castanheira and Chambel, 2010a), representing a fruitful research context for studying organizational politics. In fact, the standardization processes that are typical in call centres subsume power centralization, hierarchical level, lower job autonomy and task formalization, all of which have been proposed as bases for POPS (O'Connor and Morrison, 2001). Because of a high level of power and control concentration, individuals may feel that they have less influence over decisions regarding their pay or promotions, eventually perceiving them to be political. In addition, although mass production standardized processes are supported by very complex human resource management systems (Castanheira and Chambel,

2010a; Kinnie, Hutchinson and Purcell, 2000), supervisors maintain significant discretion in evaluating the performance of their employees. This is because supervisors control formal organizational monitoring policies (Hovorka-Mead et al., 2002) and the day-to-day use of this information is left up to their personal discretion. Thus, despite the 'mass production model' of call centres, there is room for different types of organizational politics to influence employees' relationships and behaviours at work (Kacmar and Ferris, 1997). Therefore, we focus on employees' POPS related to (a) general self-serving behaviours in the organization (i.e. general POPS) and (b) procedures used in the decision-making of employee pay and promotion (i.e. pay and promotion POPS), as they related the most to call centre contexts.

We suggest that exploring these two POPS dimensions separately leads to a better understanding of how politics influence important employee outcomes, such as performance and deviance, through two different mechanisms, one cognitive (i.e. authenticity) and the other emotional (i.e. emotional exhaustion). We propose that authenticity (for general POPS) and emotional exhaustion (for pay and promotion POPS) may channel the effects of politics on employee performance and deviance, respectively. Authenticity concerns behaviours that reflect a cognitive belief that one can stay true to oneself at work (Wood et al., 2008), whereas emotional exhaustion is a strain dimension caused by chronic stress exposure (Maslach and Jackson, 1986).

We explore these open issues in three studies (one multi-source survey and two experiments) and by doing so, contribute to the literature on POPS by investigating POPS as multidimensional constructs in a service context and by exploring two important mediating mechanisms that explain the effects of POPS (one cognitive and one emotional).

The cognitive route: general POPS, authenticity and performance

Social cognitive theory (SCT) was introduced by Bandura (1986) to explain a process in which reciprocal causal relationships between the individual, behaviour and the environment trigger the agency, motivation, choices and actions necessary for goal achievement. SCT may also explain how perceptions of a political environment may lead

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[1]In this paper, we use the terms 'contact centre' and 'call centre' interchangeably.

to feelings of inauthenticity, especially as it relates to performance or the ability to be successful in the job. Working contexts that are perceived as being high in general politics are characterized by self-serving interpersonal behaviours, not formally sanctioned by the organization, to achieve self-interests, advantages and benefits at the expense of others (Ferris *et al.*, 1989; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991). These contexts often become arenas of interpersonal manipulation, defamation and illegitimate ways of overusing power (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997; Vigoda, 2000). Common employee behaviours in these contexts span from withholding information from co-workers, using flattery to get favours, shifting blame, to maligning others to make one look better (Harris, 2007). Thus, employees who work in organizations perceived to be high in general politics learn that to possess resources and perform well, they may be required to act politically. In the light of SCT (Bandura, 1986), this may come at the cost of employees intentionally behaving less authentically at work.

Authenticity can be defined as being true to oneself (Wood *et al.*, 2008). Roberts *et al.* (2009) define it as a consistency between one's external expressions and internal experiences. We propose that the process in which perception of politics leads to decreased authenticity and poorer performance at work encompasses several cognitive mechanisms, such as: symbolizing, forethought, vicarious learning, self-regulation and self-reflection (Bandura, 1986; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

First, as related to the symbolizing capability of SCT, employees may create abstract mental models or symbols of the characteristics, abilities and motivations of their colleagues, leaders and powerful members in the organization (Bandura, 1986). These mental models allow for an effective retrieval of relevant past experiences, eventually helping employees select the right type of action or behaviour to be successful in a given context. Accordingly, if the environment is perceived to be political, symbolizing allows employees to transform their experience into models or guides for action (that fit the political environment) versus authentic behaviour.

Second, through the mechanism of forethought, employees anticipate their plan of action and think of the possible consequences of their behaviours (Bandura, 1991; Feather, 1982; Locke and Latham, 1990). Employees use their mental maps and forethought to determine if their actions

or behaviours are appropriate to the context and if they would help them achieve the necessary outcome. For example, employees may perceive that they must fake a friendship to be able to get the necessary resources to do their job. Therefore, they visualize scenarios to achieve outcomes not based on how they feel but based on strategy to achieve their goal.

Third, through the SCT mechanism of vicarious learning, employees not only take into consideration their own past behaviours and consequences of these behaviours, they also learn from observing the behaviours of others and their organizational ramifications (Bandura, 1991; Wood and Bandura, 1989). In this case, knowledge of political norms is obtained through observation of political behaviours – and the subsequent judgement of these behaviours (Fedor *et al.*, 1998). Through environmental observation, individuals may learn if their authentic behaviours are reinforced or punished by the organization and its members.

The fourth SCT mechanism is self-regulation, which involves self-direction and self-motivation in reaction to discrepancies between personal standards and behaviour (Bandura, 1986; Locke and Latham, 1990). In this case, employees might look for ways to achieve their organizational objectives based on their chosen course of action. For example, employees might perceive that they need to use flattery to obtain certain benefits, as authentic requests (without flattery) would probably not be reinforced.

The fifth SCT mechanism is self-reflection, in which employees continuously assess how their personal standards fit with their perception of the organizational requirements (Bandura, 1986). The core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions plays an influential role in human functioning (Holden, 1991; Multon, Brown and Lent, 1991; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998; Zimmerman, 2000). For example, individuals may perceive that taking responsibility for a mistake may not lead to the originally expected recognition of being accountable and autonomous. Since taking responsibility for mistakes might lead to a public image of incompetence, employees may end up adjusting future behaviours to shift blame to others, perhaps avoiding any accountability for their personal actions.

To summarize, SCT as supported by the five underlying mechanisms can provide a rich framework to explain how general POPS may lead to

reduced authenticity and, indirectly, lower performance. Inauthentic employees are influenced by their environment and mould their behaviour into what is expected of them (Goldman and Kernis, 2002). In service contexts, such as call centres, this may be particularly important because authenticity enhances customers' satisfaction during the service encounter (Diefendorff and Richard, 2003; Grandey et al., 2005; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Tsai and Huang, 2002). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1: General POPS is negatively related to authenticity at work.

Mediating effects of authenticity

Evidence of the impact of feelings of authenticity in the workplace is well supported. Authenticity has been linked to increased employee well-being and self-esteem, as well as to decreased levels of stress and depression (Goldman and Kernis, 2002; Neff and Harter, 2002; Wood et al., 2008) and, more recently, Reis (2016) found that authenticity and employee engagement are related. More importantly, previous research has demonstrated a positive association between authenticity and service outputs (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Barger and Grandey, 2006; Diefendorff and Richard, 2003; Grandey, 2000; Grandey et al., 2005; Groth, Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2009; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Tsai and Huang, 2002; Victorino, Bolinger and Verma, 2012), including its important effects on employee performance (Metin et al., 2016; Van Den Bosch and Taris, 2014).

We propose that authenticity explains why general POPS influences employee performance. According to SCT, the social context of the organization provides cues to employees on how to construct, interpret and interact with their own reality. These cues are directly communicated by co-workers, consciously observed in others' behaviours and more generally, vicariously learned through interactions with agents of the organization (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Therefore, we expect that the perception of general POPS decreases authenticity in employees, which consequently makes employees underperform during their customer service:

H2: Authenticity mediates the relationship between general POPS and performance, such

that the greater the general POPS, the lower the authenticity; and the lower the authenticity, the poorer is the employee performance.

The emotional route: pay and promotion POPS, emotional exhaustion and deviance

Perceptions of high pay and promotions POPS indicate high gamesmanship, lack of meritocracy and uncertainty (Hall et al., 2004).[2] They are a sign to employees that the organization is not acting fairly and, consequently, workers will not know which of their actions will be reciprocated with rewards rather than punishment (Ferris et al., 1989; Harris, Andrews and Kacmar, 2007; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991). High perceptions of pay and promotion POPS are therefore associated with perceived ambiguity (Ferris et al., 2012; Ladebo, 2006) about the organization's policies, which may trigger an appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) of the work context as threatening and demanding (Chang, 2009). This may lead to increased strain (e.g. Schuler, 1980) and will quite possibly generate feelings of emotional exhaustion among organizational members.

Emotional exhaustion is a psychological strain characterized by a general lack of energy and is the core dimension of burnout with resonance in working contexts with high job demands (Maslach and Jackson, 1986), such as in the case of call centres (De Cuyper et al., 2014). We propose that emotional exhaustion arises when employees perceive that the relationship between actions and rewards is ambiguous and places higher demands on employees. In these cases, employees will feel that they put much more into the relationship than they are likely to get in return. Indeed, looking at the psychological contract in terms of employees' subjective notions of the internal standards (expecting gains that are proportional to their investment and inputs), if there is a breach, employees may feel stress (Schaufelli, Van Dierendonck

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[2]Although organizational politics and distributive justice concepts might seem equivalent, or that they represent a single underlying construct, previous research by Ferris et al. (1995) and Andrews and Kacmar (2001) demonstrated that these two concepts are related, but theoretically and methodologically different. Specifically, organizational politics is in the eye of the beholder and employees' perceptions of the political environment influence perceptions of justice.

and Van Grop, 1996). In this regard, we expect that employees will experience stress because of a resource loss, a perception of a loss, or when expected outcomes are not likely to be obtained (Hobfoll, 2001). Accordingly, we expect that pay and promotion POPS will induce emotional exhaustion in employees, which is the draining of emotional resources (Gonzalez-Roma *et al*., 2006), leading to fatigue and states of depletion (Maslach and Jackson, 1986). Thus, we hypothesize:

> *H3:* Pay and promotion POPS are positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Mediating effects of emotional exhaustion

POPS have been related to many negative outcomes in organizations, such as job stress, lack of cooperation, withdrawal and burnout (Poon, 2006). Emotional exhaustion is a consequence of the excessive demands in a call centre environment and has been associated with increased employee deviance (van Jaarsveld, Walker and Skarlicki, 2010).

Workplace deviance is an expensive and pervasive problem for organizations (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). Deviance represents how much employees engage in behaviours that significantly violate normal conduct at work (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Few studies have examined the impact of POPS on workplace deviance (Nasurdin, Ahmad and Razalli, 2014; Rosen and Levy, 2013; Wiltshire, Bourdage and Lee, 2014). Specifically, Wiltshire (2014) examined the moderating effect of honesty–humility individuals on the POPS–deviance relationship and found that for low honesty–humility individuals the relationship was stronger. Rosen and Levy (2013) tested if strain and psychological contract breach would mediate the relationship between POPS and counterproductive work behaviour. They did not find a mediator effect, only a direct one. Nasurdin, Ahmad and Razalli (2014) found that stress was an effective mediator of the POPS–deviance relationship; however, in their study, deviance was measured by the individual, and not the supervisor. We contribute to these earlier findings by suggesting that emotional exhaustion is an important mechanism that explains why pay and promotion POPS lead to deviant behaviours. We expect that high levels of pay and promotion POPS in organizations will create environments with high stress and a per-

ceived imbalance in the employee–organization relationship. To restore feelings of balance, employees may engage in deviance as an emotional coping strategy (Krischer, Penney and Hunter, 2010). In fact, the choice to behave in counterproductive ways may be instrumental in receding the strain of political pay and promotions decisions. Hence, we hypothesize:

> *H4:* Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between pay and promotion POPS and deviance, such that the higher the pay and promotion POPS, the higher the emotional exhaustion; and the higher the emotional exhaustion, the higher the employee deviance.

Study 1

Sample and procedure

The sample comprised 132 call centre operator–supervisor dyads from one large organization; 104 participants were female (78.8%) and the average age was 30.32 (SD = 7.48 years). Almost two-thirds (62.8%) completed high school and 24.8% held a university degree. Average tenure in the company was 30 months (SD = 26.5). Surveys were delivered by the HR department on paper to employees and supervisors, and they were matched via identification numbers with the informed consent of workers.

Measures

General POPS was measured with five items developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Sample items for this scale include 'Agreeing with powerful others is the best alternative in this organization' and 'It is best not to rock the boat in this organization' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$).

Pay and promotion POPS was measured by employees answering four questions developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Sample items for this scale include 'The stated pay and promotion policies have nothing to do with how pay raises and promotions are determined' and 'Promotions on this team are not

valued because they are determined in a very political way' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$).

Emotional exhaustion was rated using the four items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) with a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'never' to 'every day'. Sample questions include 'I feel emotionally drained by my work' and 'I feel burned out from my work'. Cronbach's α was 0.85 for this scale.

Authenticity was measured by employees answering three questions (Wood *et al.*, 2008) on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'never' to 'every day'. Sample items for this scale include 'In my work, I am true to myself in most situations' and 'In my work, I always stand by what I believe in' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$).

Task performance was measured by supervisors answering four questions (Williams and Anderson, 1991) on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'never' to 'almost always'. Sample items for this scale include 'Performs the tasks assigned to him/her' and 'Meets the specific responsibilities for his/her function' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$).

Deviance was measured by supervisors answering three questions (Aquino, Lewis and Bradfield, 1999) on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'never' to 'almost always'. Sample items for this scale include 'This employee intentionally slows down the pace of his/her work' and 'This employee takes care of personal issues during work time, instead of performing his function's tasks' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.72$).

Control variables. Tenure and gender can be related to individuals' capacity to adapt to stress and develop strategies to deal with it (Schaufeli and Buunk, 2003), as well as to performance (Ng and Feldman, 2010; Roth *et al.*, 2012). Accordingly, we controlled for gender (codified as a dummy variable) and tenure (in months).

Statistical analysis

We followed a two-step approach (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) and used structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the measurement model and to compare various competing models. Analyses were computed with the AMOS 17.0 software package (Arbuckle, 2008), and the maximum likelihood estimation method and the covariance matrix were used. We evaluated the overall goodness-of-fit of the models with a combination of several fit indices, comparing the models with chi-square difference tests and other fit indices: the standardized root mean square (SRMR), the incremental fit index (IFI), the Bentler comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). For IFI and CFI, values greater than 0.90 are typically considered acceptable, and values greater than 0.95 represent a good model fit; for SRMR and RMSEA, values less than 0.05 indicate a good model fit, values up to 0.08 are deemed reasonable and those between 0.08 and 0.10 indicate mediocre fit (Byrne, 2010; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Results

Measurement models and descriptive analysis. The full measurement model was first tested. This model (six-factor model) included all observed items loading on their respective latent variables (general perceived organizational politics, pay and promotion politics, exhaustion, authenticity, task performance and deviance). The latent variables were allowed to correlate with each other. The full measurement model obtained an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(215) = 378.33$, $p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.07; IFI = 0.90; CFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.08), and all standardized regression coefficients were significant at the 0.001 level.

To check for common method variance, we tested an additional model in which an unmeasured latent methods factor was added to the six-factor model, allowing all items to load on their theoretical constructs, as well as on the latent methods factor (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012). The methods model obtained an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(192) = 315.99$, $p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.07; IFI = 0.93; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.07). Because one model cannot be nested within the other model, but both have the same observed variables, the comparison of the goodness-of-fit of these models was calculated by CFI difference. The change of CFI between both models was 0.03, which is below the suggested rule of thumb of 0.05 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1990). Therefore, we conclude that including the method factor in the model does not significantly improve the overall fit of the model. In addition, we tested another model in which we loaded all variables onto one general factor (one-factor model). This model showed a mediocre fit to the data ($\chi^2(230) = 1,274.49$,

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for all variables*

Variables	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	ASV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender (a)												
2. Tenure (b)	29.64	26.46				0.22*						
3. General POPS	2.79	0.97	0.85	0.53	0.12	0.01	−0.02					
4. Pay and promotion POPS	2.64	0.77	0.80	0.50	0.11	0.01	0.15	0.38***				
5. Emotional exhaustion	3.24	1.44	0.85	0.59	0.04	0.11	0.05	0.10	0.25**			
6. Authenticity	5.97	1.53	0.88	0.71	0.05	0.03	0.16	−0.31***	−0.01	0.04		
7. Task performance	3.77	0.80	0.94	0.81	0.07	0.16	0.14	−0.24***	−0.16	−0.01	0.31***	
8. Deviance	1.27	0.54	0.72	0.46	0.11	−0.10	0.00	0.26***	0.33***	0.25**	−0.01	−0.33***

Note: N = 133. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; ASV = average shared variance; POPS = perceived organizational politics; SD = standard deviation. (a) Dummy variable coded 0 for male and 1 for female; (b) in months. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

$p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.20; IFI = 0.38; CFI = 0.38; RMSEA = 0.19), indicating that a single factor does not account for the majority of variance in data.

Finally, other nested models were computed to test alternative combinations of observed variables. We first tested a five-factor model in which general POPS and pay and promotion POPS observed items were loaded onto a latent variable, and the remaining observed items were loaded onto their respective latent variables (exhaustion, authenticity, task performance and deviance). This model obtained a mediocre fit ($\chi^2(220) = 494.58$, $p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.09; IFI = 0.84; CFI = 0.84; RMSEA = 0.10) and demonstrated that these two dimensions of POPS are two independent constructs, and therefore should be included as such in the structural equation model. Second, another five-factor model was explored in which exhaustion and authenticity observed items were loaded onto a latent variable and the remaining observed items were loaded onto their respective latent variables (general POPS, pay and promotion POPS, task performance and deviance). Once again, this model obtained a mediocre fit ($\chi^2(220) = 622.98$, $p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.13; IFI = 0.76; CFI = 0.76; RMSEA = 0.12), therefore showing that these two constructs are also independent and should be treated as such. Finally, we tested another model in which task performance and deviance observed items were loaded onto a latent variable and the remaining observed items were loaded onto their respective latent variables (general POPS, pay and promotion POPS, exhaustion and authenticity). This model also obtained a poor fit to the data ($\chi^2(220) = 467.09$, $p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.10; IFI = 0.86; CFI = 0.85; RMSEA = 0.09) and

demonstrated that employee performance and deviance are distinct facets of workers' behaviours. As an additional test of discriminant validity, we calculated the average variance extracted for each variable included in our model (see Fornell and Larcker, 1981). According to Fornell and Larcker's (1981) test, constructs are sufficiently different from one another if the variable average variance extracted is greater than its shared variance with any other variable in the model. This condition was met, and therefore we could conclude that all the variables were distinct from one another. These values are reported in Table 1, along with inter-scale correlations and descriptive statistics for all the variables.

Tests of hypotheses. To test our hypotheses, we computed a structural equation model with a bootstrap approach (using 10,000 bootstrap samples) to calculate 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CI) of standardized indirect effects. In the model, authenticity and exhaustion, as well as supervisor-rated task performance and deviance, were allowed to correlate, and gender and tenure were introduced as observed variables to control for potential confounding effects.[3]

The mediation model included direct structural paths from general POPS to task performance and authenticity; from authenticity to task performance; from pay and promotion POPS to deviance and emotional exhaustion; and from emotional exhaustion to deviance. This model (Figure 1) had an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2(255) = 429.74$, $p < 0.001$; SRMR = 0.07; IFI = 0.90; CFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.07).

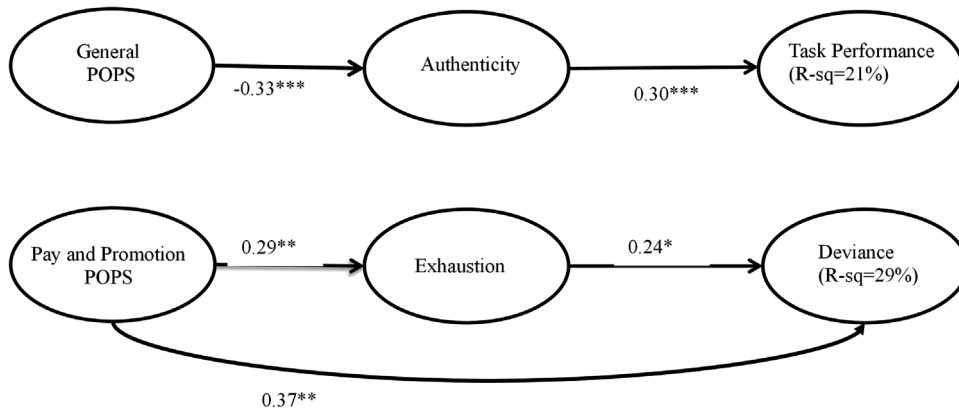[3]The results of this model remain statistically unchanged with the exclusion of the control variables.

Figure 1. Study 1: Standardized path coefficients for the structural equation model (N = 132)

General POPS was not significantly associated with supervisor-rated task performance ($\beta = -0.18$, p = 0.06), and pay and promotions POPS was significantly associated with supervisor-rated deviance ($\beta = 0.37$, p < 0.01). Furthermore, general POPS was negatively associated with authenticity ($\beta = -0.33$, p < 0.001), whereas pay and promotion POPS was positively associated with exhaustion ($\beta = 0.29$, p < 0.01). In addition, authenticity was positively associated with supervisor-rated task performance ($\beta = 0.30$, p < 0.001), and exhaustion was significantly associated with supervisor-rated deviance ($\beta = 0.24$, p < 0.05). Therefore, we observed a significant indirect effect of general POPS on supervisor-rated task performance through authenticity (indirect effect = −0.10; 95% CI from −0.21 to −0.03) and a significant indirect effect of pay and promotion POPS on supervisor-rated deviance through exhaustion (indirect effect = 0.07; 95% CI from 0.01 to 0.20).[4] Therefore, results supported the hypotheses that the relationship between general POPS and task performance was mediated by authenticity (H2), and the relationship between pay and promotion POPS and deviance was mediated by exhaustion (H4). To address the potential causality effects and provide generalizability to these findings, we developed two experimental studies.

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[4]To rule out potential competing effects, we tested an alternative structural model that included non-hypothesized effects of general POPS on emotional exhaustion and deviance; pay and promotion POPS on authenticity and task performance; emotional exhaustion on task performance; and authenticity on deviance. The results of this model remained statistically unchanged.

Study 2

Participants and design

We recruited 157 US subjects through the online web-based platform Amazon MTurk who participated in an online questionnaire for a nominal fee.[5] The sample consisted of 89 females and 68 males, in which the average age was 42.4 years (SD = 14.2) and the average work experience was 18.8 years (SD = 12.2). We employed a between-subject design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions, namely low and high general POPS.

Procedure

Participants read a scenario in which they were asked to imagine that they worked in a call centre called 'Customer First' and that their job consisted of helping customers over the phone. We created our scenarios depicting general POPS based on the items developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997), which refer to organizational politics in interacting with people at work (i.e. general politics). In the high general POPS, respondents read that at Customer First, agreeing with powerful others was the best choice and that it was better not to 'rock the boat' and remain quiet, rather than fight the system. For example, when interacting with colleagues or supervisors, telling them what they wanted to hear was sometimes

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[5]The subjects were paid an average hourly rate ($7) to participate in our experiment, which is comparable to the minimum wage in the United States. http://mturkpublic.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/MTURK_BP.pdf
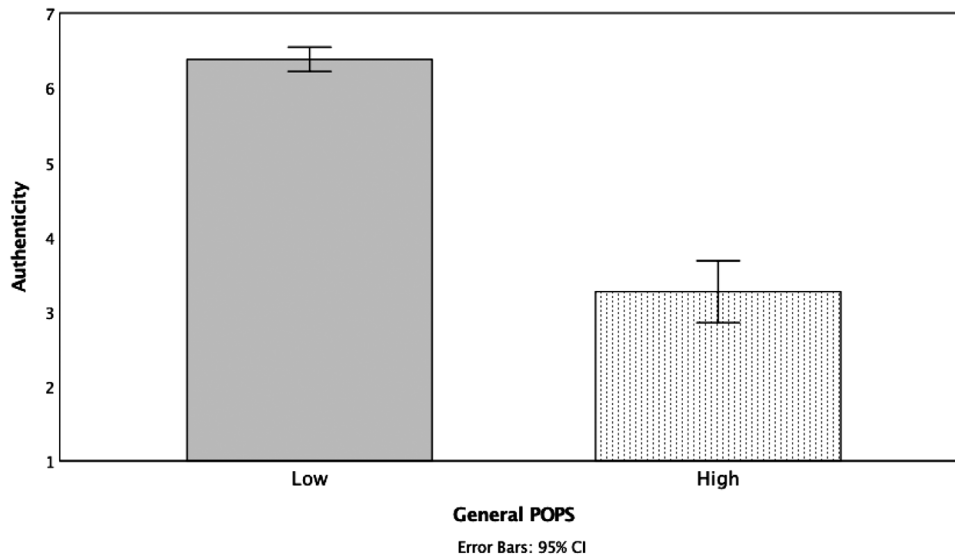
Figure 2. Study 2: Mean authenticity ratings by general POPS condition (low/high)

better than telling the truth. In the low general POPS, respondents read that at Customer First, agreeing with powerful others was not important. They could 'rock the boat' or remain quiet if they decided to fight the system. When interacting with colleagues or supervisors, they did not have to be careful to say what they wanted to hear.

Subsequently, respondents from both conditions (i.e. high and low general POPS) indicated their likelihood of experiencing and engaging in the same measures as Study 1, namely authenticity (Wood *et al.*, 2008; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.99$) and task performance (Williams and Anderson, 1991; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$).

Results

Manipulation check. As a manipulation check, we asked the study subjects the following question: 'In terms of interacting with others at work, how "political" do you think Customer First is?' (1 = not political, 7 = extremely political). As expected, participants in the high general POPS condition rated their organization as more political (N = 79; mean = 5.33) than participants in the low general POPS (N = 78; mean = 2.90, p < 0.001, Cohen's d = 1.35).

Hypothesis testing. To test the effects of general POPS on authenticity, we compared the means of authenticity for the two experimental groups (i.e. high and low general POPS). Supporting H1, the authenticity scores for subjects in the high general POPS condition were lower (N = 79; mean = 3.27) than those of participants in the low general POPS (N = 78; mean = 6.38, p < 0.001, Cohen's d = 2.20; see Figure 2). In addition, we tested our mediational H2 – that authenticity mediates the relationship between general POPS and task performance – using hierarchical regressions and the bootstrapping method for testing indirect effects (see Preacher and Hayes, 2004; Shrout and Bolger, 2002).

As can be seen in Table 2, the direct effect of manipulated general POPS on authenticity was negative and significant ($\beta = -1.56$, p < 0.001), while the direct effect of manipulated general POPS on task performance was not significant ($\beta = 0.04$, ns). Further, the effect of authenticity on task performance was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.11$, p < 0.05). Confirming these mediational results, the index for the indirect effect of general POPS on task performance through authenticity was negative and significant (-0.17), and the 95% bias-corrected CI ranged from LLCI = -0.335 to ULCI = -0.012 (10,000 bootstrap resamples).

Table 2. Study 2 – results of the mediation test

Variable	Authenticity			Task performance		
	β	SE	t-Value	β	SE	t-Value
Constant	4.82***	0.11	42.81	5.91***	0.23	25.45
General POPS[a]	−1.56***	0.11	−13.82	0.04	0.10	0.37
Authenticity				0.11*	0.05	2.32
R^2	0.55***			0.06**		

[a] Experimentally manipulated, coded as +1 for the high condition and −1 for the low condition.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. POPS = perceived organizational politics; SE = standard error.

Study 3

Participants and design

We recruited 158 US subjects on Amazon MTurk who participated in our experiment in exchange for a small economic reward. The sample consisted of 48 females and 110 males, in which the average age was 37.2 years (SD = 9.91) and the average work experience was 11.8 years (SD = 8.50). In our between-subject design, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions, namely high and low pay and promotion POPS.

Procedure

As in Study 2, respondents read that they worked in a contact centre called 'Customer First'. The scenario describing pay and promotion POPS was based on items developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) and referred to organizational politics in raises and promotion decisions. In the high pay and promotion POPS condition, participants read that at Customer First, organizational policies and procedures were irrelevant for pay and promotion decisions, and although performance metrics were available (e.g. customer satisfaction, number of calls), promotions were determined in an obscure way. In contrast, in the low pay and promotion POPS condition, respondents read that at Customer First, organizational policies and procedures were very important for pay and promotion decisions. In addition, performance metrics were available (e.g. customer satisfaction, number of calls) and they were used in a transparent way to determine promotions and pay raises. Next, both groups of respondents (i.e. high and low conditions) indicated their likelihood of experiencing and engaging in the same measures as

Study 1, namely subsequent emotional exhaustion (Maslach and Jackson, 1986; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) and deviance (Aquino, Lewis and Bradfield, 1999; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$).

Results

Manipulation check. As a manipulation check, subjects rated how political their organization was by answering the question 'In terms of pay and promotions how "political" do you think Customer First is?' (1 = not political, 7 = extremely political). As expected, participants in the high pay and promotion POPS condition (N = 80; mean = 4.88) rated their organization as more political than participants in the low pay and promotion POPS (N = 78; mean = 3.91, p < 0.001, Cohen's d = 0.47).

Hypothesis testing. To test the effects of pay and promotion POPS on emotional exhaustion, we compared the means of emotional exhaustion for the two experimental groups (i.e. high and low pay and promotion POPS). As hypothesized, the score of emotional exhaustion for subjects in the high pay and promotion POPS condition was lower (N = 80; mean = 5.39) than that of participants in the low pay and promotion POPS (N = 78; mean = 4.72, p < 0.01, Cohen's d = 0.53; see Figure 3). Thus, these results also support H2. Moreover, we tested our mediational H4 – that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between pay and promotion POPS and deviance – using hierarchical regressions and the bootstrapping method for testing indirect effects (see Preacher and Hayes, 2004; Shrout and Bolger, 2002).

As can be seen in Table 3, the direct effect of manipulated pay and promotion POPS on emotional exhaustion was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.33$, p < 0.01), while the direct effect of manipulated
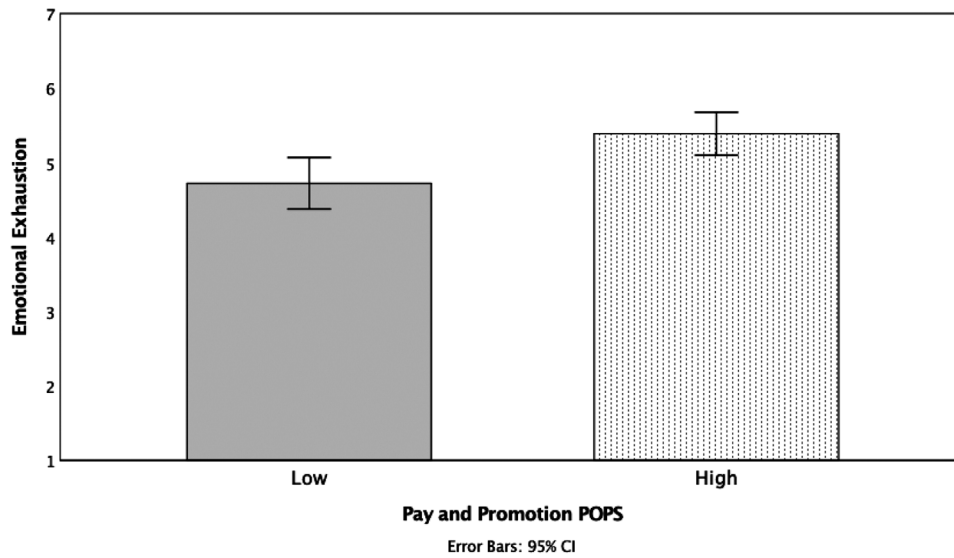
Figure 3. Study 3: Mean emotional exhaustion ratings by pay and promotion POPS condition (low/high)

Table 3. *Study 3 – results of the mediation test*

Variable	Emotional exhaustion			Deviance		
	β	SE	t-Value	β	SE	t-Value
Constant	5.05***	0.11	44.76	0.39	0.42	0.93
Pay and promotion POPS[a]	0.33**	0.11	2.95	0.18	0.12	1.52
Emotional exhaustion				0.76***	0.08	9.34
R^2	0.05**			0.40***		

[a] Experimentally manipulated, coded as $+1$ for the high condition and -1 for the low condition.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. POPS = perceived organizational politics; SE = standard error.

pay and promotion POPS on deviance was not significant ($\beta = 0.18$, ns). Further, the effect of emotional exhaustion on deviance was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.76$, p < 0.001). Confirming these mediational results, the index for the indirect effect of pay and promotion POPS on deviance through emotional exhaustion was positive and significant (0.25), and the 95% bias-corrected CI ranged from LLCI = 0.082 to ULCI = 0.428 (10,000 bootstrap resamples).

Discussion

This research was designed to explore if different perceptions of politics (general POPS and pay and promotion POPS) influence employee performance and deviance through two distinct mechanisms: one cognitive, based on employee authenticity and another emotional, relying on emotional exhaustion. Across three studies (a field study in a call centre and two experiments), we consistently found that employees who reported higher perceptions of general politics tended to perform more poorly because they acted in a less authentic way. In addition, employees who perceived higher pay and promotion politics reported feeling more emotionally exhausted, which was associated with increased deviant behaviours. These results suggest that the effects of politics on workers might differ according to the type of political behaviour involved.

Theoretical implications

Our findings offer important theoretical implications for research on perceived POPS, employees' attitudes and performance. The results of both our experiments and field study argue in favour of the multidimensionality of the POPS construct

(Kacmar and Ferris, 1991). Although originally developed as a single-dimension construct (Ferris and Kacmar, 1989), the present research replicates earlier findings suggesting that POPS is composed of different dimensions (Fedor *et al.*, 1998; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991). Indeed, whereas general POPS seems to be related to how employees perceive the environmental context and their relationships at work, perceptions of pay and promotion POPS may reflect the way employees appraise how HR practices are implemented at work, and thus may directly impact the employee–organization relationship (Shore *et al.*, 2004). This may be especially pertinent in the case of performance appraisal and rewards, as these HR practices have a direct impact on job security, career perspectives and employee income. Therefore, being able to distinguish how the perceptions of these two dimensions of POPS may impact employees' attitudes and outcomes sheds some light on why the relationship between POPS and performance has not always been conclusive.

We developed and empirically tested a model to explain how general POPS and pay and promotion POPS relate to employee performance and deviance, respectively. In this model, we unveil two mediating mechanisms: one involving authenticity at work, explained by SCT (Bandura, 1986), and another based on emotional exhaustion and deviance as a coping strategy to symbolically regain control over political decisions made by the organization (Henle and Blanchard, 2008; Krischer, 2010). We found the source of different types of POPS to be very important. If employees feel that they have the potential to interact and change their own environment (general POPS), they might change their behaviour and act more (or less) authentically. Engagement in such behaviours will eventually influence their own performance. Yet, if they feel powerless because of the politics stemming from the organization and its policies, they might just feel exhausted and adjust their behaviour to cope with this exhaustion, specifically behaving in counterproductive ways.

Authenticity at work is a very important attitude in the service context because employees may feel tempted to fake emotions to comply with standardized procedures required by the organization (Deery, Iverson and Walsh, 2002; Grandey *et al.*, 2012), yet if their displayed emotions are perceived by customers as not genuine, the negative effects

of not being authentic will spill over and lead to lower ratings of service delivery (Grandey, 2003) and diminished customer willingness to return to the store (Tsai, 2001). In our field study, we demonstrated that less authentic workers are indeed rated as poorer performers. Furthermore, our experiment and field study results indicate that feelings of authenticity at work and employee performance may be affected by perceived general POPS.

As contact centres are often regarded as highly stressful working contexts (Castanheira and Chambel, 2010a; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2014; Lewig and Dollard, 2003), we also tested whether politics influence feelings of emotional exhaustion, and eventually deviance as a coping strategy (Castanheira and Chambel, 2010b; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2014; Henle and Blanchard, 2008; Singh, 1994). In this regard, we found that pay and promotion POPS acts as a stressor that drains employees' resources (Cropanzano and Li, 2006; Cropanzano *et al.*, 1997; Hochwarter *et al.*, 2003), leading to more emotional exhaustion and, in line with earlier research, an increase in employee deviant behaviour.

Additionally, we found that general POPS did not lead to an increase of emotional exhaustion on employees, only a decrease in authenticity. This is not surprising, as previous studies demonstrated that individuals tend to be less authentic at work than in other contexts of their life (Robinson *et al.*, 2013); therefore, they are expected to behave in more inauthentic ways in the workplace. However, based on stress theory, strong emotional exhaustion was reported by employees who were overworked, had little control over their work and had conflicting work demands. These are characteristics not associated with general POPS. Similarly, inauthenticity may influence individuals' performance because of the service context; however, it does not lead individuals to behave in counterproductive ways to 'cope' with the stress of unfair organizational policies.

Similarly, because pay and promotion policies are beyond employee control, perceptions of politics related to them should not affect employee authenticity. In fact, no matter how authentic an employee is, she/he will not be able to influence organizational processes related to pay and promotions. In contrast, emotional exhaustion should not decrease employee performance because employees need to perform their duties to keep their job; however, they manage this perceived

imbalance by behaving counterproductively. This is also not surprising as in the service industry, employees who intentionally reduce their performance might incur considerable costs, such as jeopardizing their employment relationship (CIETT, 2016) or decreasing their monthly income (Castanheira and Chambel, 2010b; Singh, 2000). Accordingly, our results suggest that pay and promotion POPS is associated with more deviant behaviours, because employees often get exhausted by unmatched expectations. Consequently, in restoring the balance in their relationship with the organization, they choose to intentionally slow down work or take longer breaks (deviant behaviours), which does not necessarily address the stressor at hand (pay and promotion POPS) but helps provide some emotional comfort and regain symbolic control over the terms of the relationship. To our knowledge, few studies have examined the relationship between POPS and deviance (Nasurdin, Ahmad and Razalli, 2014; Rosen and Levy, 2013; Wiltshire, Bourdage and Lee, 2014), and more research is therefore needed to investigate why and when employees engage in deviance as a 'safer' (although less visible) response to 'political' organizational practices.

While we used call centres to contextualize the two different types of POPS, our results have implications for research into other industries and jobs that require courtesy, efficiency and effectiveness (Clark *et al.*, 2019). Front-line employees, especially in service organizations, experience paradoxical challenges (Singh, 2000), which are quite visible in call centre contexts (Clark *et al.*, 2019; Kinnie, Hutchinson and Purcell, 2000). Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, we have observed an exponential growth of e-commerce and on-line channels, making this tech-mediated service encounter a more frequent and relevant reality in which politics may emerge and influence service outcomes. Therefore, our findings can be extended to these new contexts.

Finally, in testing our model using different sources (i.e. employees and supervisors), we contribute to previous findings on POPS by shedding light on the relationship between different types of POPS and distinct supervisor-rated outcomes, together with overcoming methodological concerns associated with common method and source biases, self-deception and respondents' social desirability (Podsakoff, 2012).

Limitations and future studies

Despite the contributions of this work, some limitations must be taken into consideration, as they offer opportunities for reflection about our research findings and insights for future research on organizational politics. First, since our operationalization of performance (Williams and Anderson, 1991) was originally developed for the general workplace population, it might not be able to fully capture specific aspects of performance in call centres. Although this scale has been used with success in earlier studies with customer service employees (Castanheira, 2016; Vigoda, 2000), some indicators that are strategic for service in contact centres (like tone of voice or adherence to the script) were not covered in this study. This may have caused supervisors to focus on some indicators of performance while disregarding others. Future studies should include more customer-oriented measures of performance (e.g. tone of voice, adherence to the script or number of specific problems solved).

Additionally, a possible concern deals with the fact that the subjects of Studies 2 and 3 were responding to a hypothetical scenario, rather than reacting to a real organizational situation. We followed recent guidelines on experimental vignette methodology (EVM; Aguinis and Bradley, 2014; Bradley and Aguinis, 2018) and specifically based our scenario on POPS theory. In addition, an important strength of our research resides in our multi-method (two experiments and one survey) and multi-source approach (supervisor rating for our employee outcomes), which allows us to claim a more plausible causal link between different facets of POPS and their consequences. Even so, supervisors could have used performance assessment for political reasons (Longenecker, Sims and Gioia, 1987). Nevertheless, supervisors were informed of the academic nature of this study, and we did not use pre-collected organizational data on performance. Hence, we are confident that there are no reasons to expect any incentive (political or other) for the supervisors to intentionally provide a biased assessment of employees' performance. Thus, future studies can benefit by triangulating data from multiple sources, such as comparing supervisor ratings with customer ratings of performance.

On a related note, although we collected supervisor ratings for production deviance and

performance, the remaining data were collected through workers' self-reported questionnaires, which brings concerns about common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012). To inspect the potential confounding effect of common method variance, several procedures were taken. As recommended, prior to testing the relationships between variables, we examined several measurement models, including a methods factor test (Podsakoff, 2012), as well as several nested models that demonstrated the consistency, independency and discriminant validity of our constructs. Results indicated that common method bias was not a threat in the data. Furthermore, given space constraints and the need to secure participant's anonymity and confidentiality, we were not able to collect information about supervisors. Thus, despite the likely nested nature of our data, we were unable to account for the shared variance associated with supervisor clustering. Nevertheless, Study 1 findings were corroborated by the experimental evidence offered by Studies 2 and 3, and this should mitigate possible methodological concerns.

In addition, the field study was conducted within the call centres context, which has some specificities that need to be considered compared to service sectors in general, such as the technology-mediated customer encounter, the fast pace of work, as well as the underlying performance management system. The specificities associated with the context call for caution when generalizing to other service settings. Thus, future research testing the hypothesized effects in different service contexts should increase the generalizability of the findings related to POPS.

Furthermore, we focused solely on the potential negative consequences stemming from POPS, which may have created an incomplete view of the phenomena. Indeed, some studies have also found that POPS can also lead to positive outcomes such as knowledge sharing, creativity, proactivity and adaptivity (Eldor, 2017). Future studies should try to control for political skill or some individual characteristics that may lead to some individuals benefiting from political environments.

Although in our model we focus on the emotional strain (i.e. emotional exhaustion) arising from POPS, alternative cognitive mechanisms might offer interesting avenues for future research. For example, employee cynicism, which refers to cognitive disengagement from one's job, and its motivational aspect (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Dean, Brandes and Dharwadkar, 1998; Demerouti et al., 2014), might play a mediational role that could be tested against the emotional mechanism of exhaustion.

Finally, in investigating the different facets and consequences of politics, we specifically focused on contextual variables. Future studies can further our findings by investigating the antecedents and boundary conditions of the effects of POPS, such as personality traits, personal values, emotional intelligence, locus of control, Machiavellianism, self-monitoring and negative affect (Bizzi and Sodda, 2011; O'Connor and Morrison, 2001; Valle, Witt and Hochwarter, 2002).

Conclusion

From a practical standpoint, our research underscores the importance of recognizing the negative consequences of different facets of organizational politics, and more importantly, acting upon them. Managers want to create an environment that allows workers to perform at their best without the need for acting inauthentically (general POPS) or the fear of unrewarded efforts (pay and promotion POPS). With that aim, they should pay special attention to how employees learn through observation, take special care in serving as role models and actively participate in the promotion and maintenance of a positive organizational climate. Management must provide clear feedback regarding which behaviours the organization endorses and provide incentives to supervisors for supporting environments that are not political. In a similar way, besides adopting transparent procedures for pay rises and promotions, organizations should pay closer attention to how these procedures are perceived, and clarify further the mechanisms behind career advancement and merit pay decisions to their employees, if necessary.

To conclude, politics is one of the most pervasive, yet negative attributes of modern workplaces (Miller, Rutherford and Kolodinsky, 2008). Buchanan (2008) found that 63% of his research participants stated that they did not want to be involved in politics at work, and yet they reported that it was crucial and necessary to understand the politics surrounding their own organizational context. As such, it is critical to understand both the multifaceted nature of workplace politics and its

potential detrimental effects. This research therefore provides substantial initial evidence of the dual nature of politics and highlights mechanisms that explain how perceptions of workplace politics are translated into employee performance and deviance.

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