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Determinants of Performance in Government: Focusing on the Effect of Organizational Politics and Conflicts in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts and politics in organizations are common in both the public and private sectors. However, there are few comprehensive studies regarding the relationship between politics, conflicts, and outcomes in the public sector. Therefore, this study sought to empirically explore the relationships between organizational performance, organizational conflicts, and organizational politics in the public sector. To analyze the effects of organizational politics and conflicts on performance in government organizations, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed. The results indicated that organizational politics and relationship conflicts negatively affect organizational performance.

KEYWORDS

Organizational performance; organizational politics; relationship conflict; task conflict

Introduction

Improving the performance of government organizations is one of the most important concerns in the public sector, and much effort has been made to assess factors that affect organizational performance. Thus, various studies have tried to define and measure these factors and to find the determinants of organizational performance in government organizations (Boyne, 2003; Ingraham, Joyce, & Donahue, 2003; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; Andrew, Boyne, & Walker, 2006; Brewer & Selden, 2000; Donahue, Selden, & Ingraham, 2000; Meier & O'Toole, 2002; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). However, it is not easy to define and explain the relationship between various organizational factors and the performance of government organizations because "organizational performance is a difficult concept to define and measure" (Brewer & Selden, 2000, p. 685) and there are too many "key components of the *black box*," including many intervening variables related to the relationship (Donahue, Selden, & Ingraham, 2000).

Conflicts and politics are common in most organizations and they may affect organizational performance. According to Farazmand (1999), political factors are as

important as instrumental rationality factors in determining organizational goals, operations, and processes. Thus, public organizations need effective conflict management strategies and ways of shaping organizational politics that are constructive. However, there are few comprehensive studies regarding the relationship between politics, conflicts, and organizational performance in the public sector except for the studies of Vigoda (2000a, 2000b) and Parker, Dipboye, and Jackson (1995), though there have been continuous academic and practical attempts at exploring the effects of organizational politics and conflicts on organizational outcomes in the business administration field.¹ Since political rationality plays important roles in public organizations of all types, excluding political theories in organizational research is very problematic (Farazmand, 1999).

Therefore, this study sought to empirically explore the relationships between organizational performance, organizational conflicts, and organizational politics in the public sector. On this basis, we begin to address the following primary research questions in this analysis. How do organizational politics and conflicts matter in the performance of government organizations? How do perceptions of organizational politics affect the performance of government

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¹Although many researchers in business administration have made efforts to study organizational conflicts, conflict management, organizational politics, and organizational performance, their studies are limited in several ways because most of their research only focused on the narrow perspective of the relationships between conflicts and performance or between politics and performance. That is, few studied extensively with a focus on the relationships between conflicts, politics, and performance simultaneously.

organizations? How do organizational conflicts affect the performance of government organizations?

Literature review

Organizational performance in public organizations

Performance improvement in public organizations has become a worldwide phenomenon and one of the most important topics in public administration. The process of performance management in public organizations can achieve a better quality of functionality, and it can contribute to enhancing the accountability of public organizations. The traditional accountability system in the public sector has generally focused on legal and political accountability (Behn, 2001). In contemporary, however, rapidly changing democratic societies, accountability cannot be narrowed down to simple legal and political issues. According to Behn (2001), accountability can refer to finances, fairness, and performance. Accountability for finances and fairness is related to legal and political responsibility. However, accountability for performance is not about rules and compliance. To hold a public agency accountable for performance, it is necessary to establish expectations for outcomes of government agencies. Accountability for performance means more than only providing the appropriate and required services to the agency's direct customers, the citizens.

Despite the importance of performance measurement and management, there are various practical difficulties and challenges in improving performance because too many internal and external factors affect it. Boyne (2003) argues that the relationship between management and performance has not been comprehensively tested and theorized. The problem is that organizational performance is extremely dynamic and many factors have an effect on it. "Organizational performance is a socially constructed phenomenon that is subjective, complex, and particularly hard to measure in the public sector" (Anspach, 1991; Au, 1996; Brewer & Selden, 2000, p. 688). The complexity of organizational performance comes from government management systems and the fact that we do not have extensive ideas and information about the processes of public organizations (Ingraham, Joyce, & Donahue, 2003). Thus, it is important to review how scholars have approached the black box of organizational performance.

Many studies have tried to examine the black box theoretically and empirically (e.g., Andrews, Boyne, &

Walker, 2006; Boschken, 1994; Boyne, 2003; Boyne, Meier, O'Toole, & Walker, 2005; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; Brewer & Selden, 2000; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). These studies found various determinants of organizational performance stemming from internal factors (organizational culture, clarity of organizational goal, centralization of decision authority, reorganization, human capital capacity, structure, leadership, red tape, and individual factors) and external factors (political support, client influence, media influence, and relationship with stakeholders).

In particular, Rainey and Steinbauer (1999) indicated that the effectiveness of organizational performance was associated with oversight authorities, stakeholder characteristics, autonomy, mission valence, organizational culture, task design, technology, human resources, professionalism, and motivation. Similarly, Brewer and Selden (2000) suggested key factors, such as organizational culture, human capital and capacity, political support, leadership, red tape, structure of task, motivation, individual performance, and other organizational characteristics. Moynihan and Pandey (2005) pointed out that the organizational performance of government is affected by environmental factors (the support of elected officials, the influence of clients, and the influence of the public) and by organizational factors (culture, centralization of decision authority, goal clarity, and barriers to reorganization). Chun and Rainey (2005) found that goal ambiguity negatively affected the managerial effectiveness of government organizations. Specifically, studies found employee alignment² (Ayers, 2015), some human resource management practices (e.g., fairness, job enrichment, individual appraisal, and professional development) (Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, & Varone, 2013), family-friendly work practices (Ko, Hur, & Smith-Walter, 2013), and public participation (Neshkova & Guo, 2011) have positive impacts on organizational performance.

Lee and Whitford (2012) used a holistic approach on the impact of organizational resources (administrative, human, financial, physical, political, and reputation resources) on federal agency effectiveness.

Nevertheless, most literature reports have not paid much attention to some crucial factors, such as interpersonal relationships, organizational conflicts, power struggles, organizational politics, and the various psychological factors of employees in public organizations. The political resource in Lee and Whitford's (2012) study only focused on external political resources such as presidential, congressional, and media attentions.

²Employees' knowledge of how their work relates to the agency's goals and priorities.

These psychological and relational factors have been neglected in the literature and research on organizational performance in the public sector. For this reason, this study targets research questions regarding the effects of organizational politics and conflicts on the performance of government organizations.

Organizational politics

Many people regard politics and power as dirty words (Pfeffer, 1981). However, we find that politics is everywhere and is one of the most significant phenomena in organizations (Mayes & Allen, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992). Nevertheless, organizational politics has been neglected in the organization literature (Pfeffer, 1981). According to Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989), “systematic inquiry in this area has been sparse and limited, leaving largely unexplored the potential antecedents and consequences of organizational politics ... Numerous specific political behaviors have been isolated and studied in the social psychological literature” (pp.143–144). Organizational politics is a very complex phenomenon, and it is not easy to estimate its effects on organizational outcomes, such as performance, job satisfaction, and commitment (Vigoda, 2000b); most of the scholars in this field agree about the paucity of literature.

According to Pfeffer (1981), organizational politics is related to activities such as acquiring, developing, and using power and other resources for obtaining one's preferred outcomes under uncertainty or dissensus in organizations. Specifically, Pfeffer (1981) argued that organizational politics comes from conflict, and there are five conditions for the use of power: interdependence, heterogeneous goals, resource scarcity, and disagreement concerning the preferences, and the technology of the organization.

While some scholars in the early stages of studies on organizational politics define organizational politics as a behavior for influencing decision-making (Pettigrew, 1973; Tushman, 1977), many others describe organizational politics in terms of a self-serving behaviour in organizations (Bruns, 1961; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Porter, 1976; Schein, 1985). Moreover, as Gandz and Murray (1980) and Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, and Mayes (1980) mention, organizational politics can be defined as a self-serving behavior for achieving self-interests, advantages, and benefits without expense to oneself. Ferris et al. (1989) similarly define organizational politics as “a social influence process

in which behavior is strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest, which is either consistent with or at the expense of others' interest” (p. 145).

Regarding the relationship between organizational performance and politics, Pfeffer (1981) was reluctant to define the relationship. He believed that organizational politics was probably positively related to performance; however, it may have a negative effect on performance when using power is not necessary (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 345). As different situations and strategies for using power may cause different effects on organizational performance, he suggested that future research needed to consider how the various strategies and situations of organizational politics affect organizational performance (Pfeffer, 1981).

Nevertheless, most studies show that there is a negative relationship between organizational politics and organizational outcomes, using the survey framework and measures suggested by Kacmar and Ferris (1991).³ Ferris et al. (1996) described how unfair activities could occur in a climate of organizational politics and how employees took negative attitudes toward voluntary efforts. Drory (1993) found that organizational politics could bring about frustration on the part of employees. Many other studies have concluded that there was a negative relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, pay satisfaction, morale, psychological safety, organizational commitment), behavior intention such as turnover intentions and organizational outcomes including organizational effectiveness, and performance (Bozeman, Perrewe, Kacmar, Hochwarter, & Brymer, 1996; Dhar, 2011; Ferris et al., 1996; Harris, Harris, & Harvey, 2007; Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Li, Wu, Liu, Kwan, & Liu, 2014; Valle & Witt, 2001; Vigoda & Cohen, 2002; Voyer, 1994; Wiltshire, Bourdage, & Lee, 2014; Witt, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2000).

Surprisingly, however, in public administration, only a few studies have empirically examined the relationship between the perceptions of organizational politics and organizational outcome variables, such as organizational performance. According to Vigoda (2000a), perceptions of organizational politics had negative effects on organizational performance in the public sector as well.⁴ Vigoda (2000a) explained that, because public sector employees tend to be passive and want to avoid risk, organizational politics decreases their job performance and commitment. The author calls this problem the “silent enemy.” As a consequence, if

³The *Perception of Organizational Politics Scale* (POPS) designed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) has been used widely for measuring organizational politics. This research employs the POPS to test the research questions.

⁴Vigoda (2000a) also used the POPS of Kacmar and Ferris (1991).

there are internal politics among public officials, organizational politics may have a negative effect on entrepreneurial strategy and creative activity in the public sector. Thus, the author concluded that organizational politics may be more harmful because it may bring about hazardous consequences, both to the public agency and to citizens (Vigoda, 2000a).

Vigoda (2000a) stated that “since the public sector represents classic bureaucracy with high formal structures, many scholars assumed that internal politics played only a secondary role in these organizations and hence paid little attention to the examination of this sector” (p. 203). That is, even though many scholars in business administration have conducted empirical studies regarding organizational politics and its effects on organizational outcomes, as Vigoda (2000b) mentions, organizational settings and conditions in the public sector differ from those in the private sector; therefore, there should possibly be distinct effects of organizational politics on public organizations. According to Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun (2005) on public school, the relationship between organizational politics and performance in public organizations was negative as well. The study by Vashdi, Vigoda-Gadot, and Shlomi (2013) examined the relationship between organizational politics and work-related outcomes in public and private organizations in Israel. The impact of the organizational politics on job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment), job distress outcomes (e.g., job stress and job burnout), and behavior intentions (e.g., negligent behavior, turnover intentions) was all significantly negative. However, more empirical researches in the context of public sector are still needed and to fully answer the research question.

Organizational conflicts

It is typical that people have differing ideas, interests, values, and goals. Thus, it is natural that conflict exists in all organizational processes (Thomas, 1976), and many scholars regard conflict as inevitable in organizations (Coser, 1956; Lorenz, 1966; Pondy, 1967; Rahim, 2001). De Dreu (1997) also argues that “Too much conflict is certainly to be avoided, but the absence of conflict seems undesirable as well” (p. 13).

There have been various explanations as to why conflict occurs. According to Pfeffer (1981), the absence of widely accepted goals and norms for decision-making and administrative strategies may bring about the use of power, dissensus, and conflicts in

organizations. That is, organizational conflicts come from interdependence, heterogeneous goals, resource scarcity, and disagreement concerning preferences and the technology of organizations⁵ (Pfeffer, 1981).

Dahrendorf (1959) defined conflict in terms of goal discrepancies, and Schmidt and Kochan (1972) also accepted this definition. Baron (1990) argued that conflict may occur when opposed interests exist among people or groups. Roloff (1987) emphasized that conflict occurs when members have incompatible expectations toward the services or products of organizations. Kochan, Huber, and Cummings (1975) analyzed how interdependence, power relationships, and differences among goals, interests, or values may bring about conflict. Based on the above descriptions, it is possible to state that conflict may occur when there is incompatibility, dissatisfaction, disagreement, interdependence, and exclusiveness in preferences, values, goals, and attitudes among people.

The problem is that conflict is generally treated as an obstacle in organizational operation. Conflict decreases goodwill and mutual understanding, and it hinders the achievement of organizational tasks (Deutsch, 1969). Conflict causes members to be negative, irritable, suspicious, and resentful, and chronic relationship conflicts can have serious detrimental effects on group functions (Coser, 1956). Thus, it is usual to think that avoiding and controlling conflict is therefore necessary in management and decision-making.

On the other hand, many studies of conflict have examined the benefits of organizational conflicts and methods for stimulating *productive* conflict (Amason, 1996; Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Jehn, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1999; Pelled, 1996; Pfeffer, 1981; Van De Vliert & De Dreu, 1994). Amason, Thompson, Hochwarter, and Harrison (1995) pointed out that “over and over during our interviews with team members, we heard that conflict can improve decision making and enhance a team’s performance . . . we also heard, however, that conflict can create more problems than it solves and thus should, in many instances, be avoided altogether” (p. 22). Pfeffer (1981) also argued that organizational conflicts may have constructive functions, depending on the different conditions and characteristics of organizations. Moreover, the results of conflict have different effects on performance depending on the types of conflict. Therefore, one needs to see both sides of organizational conflicts (see Table 1).

Two types of conflict appear in conflict studies. Guethzkow and Gyr (1954) propose that both “affective” and “substantive” conflicts exist. Affective conflict refers to conflict in interpersonal relations, while

⁵Pfeffer (1981) explains that these five conditions are fundamental factors activating organizational conflicts and politics.

substantive conflict is conflict involving the group's task. Similarly, several scholars have studied these two dimensions of conflict empirically and found that conflict can have a positive effect on the quality of decisions, service, and the performance of organizations (Amason, 1996; Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Coser, 1956; Jehn, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1999; Pelled, 1996; Pinkley, 1990; Priem & Price, 1991; Van De Vliert & De Dreu, 1994). They call this kind of positive conflict "task conflict" (or goal-oriented, neutral, and productive conflict). The other, negative conflict is called "relationship conflict" (or emotional, interpersonal, relationship-focused, affective, and individualized conflict).

In particular, Amason and Schweiger (1994) concluded that task conflict produced high-quality decisions. DeChurch and Marks (2001) found that task conflict improved organizational performance. In addition, various studies have found that the impact of task conflict could be positive and linked to increased organizational performance (Amason, 1996; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Shah & Jehn, 1993). In contrast, Gersick (1988) argued that organizations with relationship conflicts have more disagreement and increased amounts of relationship conflicts. Jehn and Mannix (2001) suggested that high-performing organizations had low levels of relationship conflict. That is, relationship conflict negatively affected cognitive organizational processes and members' attitudes and behavior, and it increased levels of stress and job anxiety (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). In sum, Jehn (1997) noted that "relationship conflict causes members to be negative, irritable, suspicious, and resentful" (p. 532).

As discussed above, various studies regarding organizational conflicts have been conducted in the sociology,

psychology, business administration, and labor management fields. However, it seems that students of public administration have largely neglected conflict in public organization studies, although "sporadic studies" have described conflict situations or cases in public administration (Lan, 1997, p. 27) and revealed micro-level (individual and organizational) conflict resolution in public organizations (Lan, 1997; Lipsky, 1980; Simon, 1957; Vizzard, 1995). That is, when the public administration literature has extensively focused on new public management (NPM), performance improvement, public reform, and effective public management, organizational conflicts and conflict management have been of less interest to students in the field of public administration.⁶ Thus, it is important to pay more attention to studying conflicts in government organizations because they do matter to public performance and management.

A model of politics, conflicts, and performance of government organizations

Hypothesis and research model

The main purpose of this study was to examine how organizational politics and conflicts affect the performance of government organizations. Based on the literature review, this study raises the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Perception of organizational politics is negatively related to perceived organizational performance.

Hypothesis 2: Task conflict is positively related to perceived organizational performance.

Hypothesis 3: Relationship conflict is negatively related to perceived organizational performance.

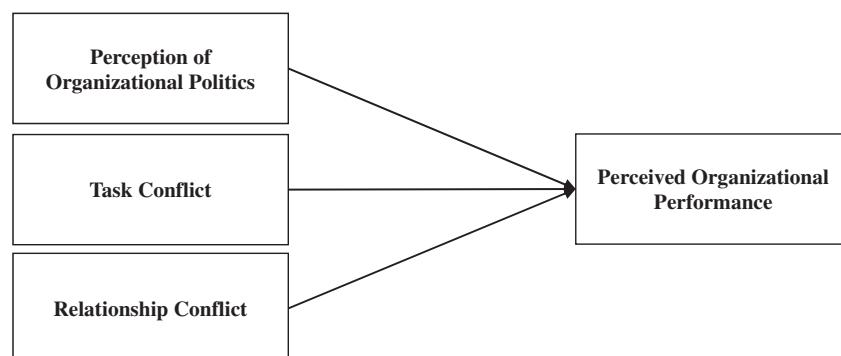


Figure 1. Research model.

⁶However, political scientists would emphasize conflict when studying power, the decision-making process, bureaucracy, and other topics linked to public administration.

Figure 1 describes the research framework of this study. In the model, there are four kinds of variables. Organizational politics and conflicts are the key independent variables. This study will examine the relationships between the independent variables and their effects on organizational performance. The dependent variable is organizational performance. Additionally, this study includes organizational culture variables (hierarchical and developmental culture), and decentralization and goal ambiguity as control variables.⁷

Data collection and sample description

This study surveyed a random sample of public administrators in New Jersey state and local governments in the United States. The first mailing lists constructed by a state university in the United States contained contact information such as names, organizations, titles, mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses of New Jersey State and local government officials. For a mail survey, this study randomly selected 500 of those 9,099 New Jersey state and local government officials from the first mailing list. For an Internet-based survey, this study constructed a second mailing list. The contact information of the second mailing list was collected from each local government's website, and included various types of New Jersey local governments, such as counties, cities, towns, townships, boroughs, and school districts. Ultimately, the sample size for the online survey was 2,141 (247 state officials and 1,984 local officials). Thus, the total sample size was 2,641 (500 via mailing and 2,141 online).

The mailing survey was conducted from January 2 to March 31, 2010, and the online survey was conducted from January 2 to February 15, 2010. From the sample of 2,141 for the online survey, 287 questionnaires were obtained; the response rate was thus 13.4% for the online survey. Of the 500 questionnaires that were initially mailed, 67 were returned because the selected respondents were no longer employed by the organizations. From the reduced sample of 433, 65 usable questionnaires were obtained for a response rate of 15.0%. Thus, this study eventually obtained 352 completed questionnaires, and the overall response rate was 13.3%.

Regarding sample descriptions of the survey, responses came from more males (66%) than from

females (34%). Most respondents were non-Hispanic Caucasians (88%), and African American and Hispanic respondents represented 6% and 3% of the total, respectively. Regarding experience in public organizations, the respondents were equally distributed. Of the respondents, 30% had worked in public organizations for less than 5 years, and 29% of the respondents had worked in government organizations for over 20 years. Moreover, 20% had worked for 6–10 years in public organizations, and 21% had worked for 11–19 years in government organizations. Regarding education level, 75.3% of the respondents had earned a bachelor's degree or higher; in particular, 29% had graduate degrees in the public administration field, such as an MPA or MPP.

Measures

Chun and Rainey (2005) argued that common, relatively objective or quantifiable measures of performance in the public sector rarely exist, making it difficult to assess organizational performance. Thus, many studies have relied on perceptual measures of organizational performance (Brewer & Selden, 2000; Chun & Rainey, 2005; Moynihan & Penday, 2005; Seldon & Sowa, 2004). For measuring organizational performance, therefore, this study carefully selected survey questions from previous studies—two questions from Brewer and Selden (2000) and two other questions from Chun and Rainey (2005)—and slightly modified them for this study. Factor analysis of these items shows that factor loadings ranged between 0.846 and 0.884. The initial eigenvalue of the scale was 2.23 and the Cronbach's α was 0.841.

Since Kacmar and Ferris (1991) created the *Perception of Organizational Politics Scale* (POPS), it has been used in most organizational politics studies (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Harrell-Cook, Ferris, & Dulebohn, 1999; Huang, Chuang, & Lin, 2003; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Parker et al., 1995; Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Valle & Witt, 2001; Vigoda, 2000a, 2000b; Vigoda, 2001; Vigoda & Cohen, 2002). For this study, the variable was measured by a three-point scale that was chosen based on previous studies. Factor analysis of these items shows that the initial eigenvalue of the scale was 1.02, and the Cronbach's α was 0.876. Factor loadings range between 0.659 and 0.762.

⁷Regarding the research model, it is necessary to mention the possibility of endogeneity issues. For instance, the poor perceived performance might cause more politics in the organization as various factions attempt to come up with reasons for the failure. Nevertheless, this study builds its research model based on the previous empirical studies and focuses on causal relationships between the variables in terms of the time precedence of independent variables, in accordance with the research models in previous studies.

Table 1. Types of conflict.

Researcher(s)/type	Positive conflict	Negative conflict
Guethzkow and Gyr (1954)	Substantive conflict	Affective conflict
Coser (1956)	Goal-oriented conflict	Emotional conflict
Pinkley (1990)	Task conflict	Relationship conflict
Priem and Price (1991)	Task-oriented conflict	Social-emotional conflict
Amason (1996)	Cognitive conflict	Affective conflict
Jehn (1997)	Task-focused conflict	Relationship-focused conflict

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, measurement validity, and correlation analysis.

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	POPS	RC	TC	DC	HC	GC	RLC	DCT	GA
POPS	3.50	1.76	.876	–								
RC	3.55	1.85	.945	.76	–							
TC	3.27	1.40	.882	.44	.51	–						
DC	3.69	1.53	.855	–.56	–.57	–.34	–					
HC	4.84	1.33	.767	–.22	–.28	–.16	.21	–				
GC	4.55	1.57	.892	–.51	–.53	–.40	.56	.27	–			
RLC	4.33	.94	.743	–.47	–.49	–.26	.52	.33	.53	–		
DCT	3.95	1.51	.835	–.60	–.43	–.28	.42	–.04	.33	.26	–	
GA	2.95	1.55	.826	.49	.54	.33	–.55	–.46	–.48	–.47	–.31	–
OP	4.50	1.43	.841	–.66	–.67	–.44	.65	.35	.63	.61	.40	–.69

*All correlation coefficients were significant at the 0.05 level.

POPS, Perception of Organizational Politics Scale; RC, relationship conflict; TC, task conflict; DC, developmental culture; HC, hierarchical culture; GC, group culture; RLC, rational culture; DCT, decentralization; GA, goal ambiguity; OP, organizational performance.

To measure organizational conflict, this study relied on Jehn's (1995) *Intragroup Conflict Scale* to measure the type and amount of conflict. The three-item summative scale has been used to assess task conflict. Factor analysis of these items shows that factor loadings ranged between 0.838 and 0.867. The initial eigenvalue of the scale was 2.57, and the Cronbach's α was 0.882.

This study relied on Cox's (1998, 2003) *Organizational Conflicts Scale* to measure relationship conflict. Friedman, Tidd, Currall, and Tsai (2000) argued that Cox's scale emphasized the active hostility found in relationship conflict and dealt more with perceptions of active conflict behavior rather than with perceptions of an overall condition of conflict. Accordingly, Cox's three-item scale (Cox, 1998, 2003) was used to measure relationship conflict in this study. Factor analysis of these items shows that factor loadings range between 0.781 and 0.811. The initial eigenvalue of the scale was 1.86, and the Cronbach's α was 0.945.

For control variables, organizational culture was measured based on the *competing values model* of Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1981), which was reexamined and operationalized by Zammuto and Krakower (1991). The questionnaire has been modified and used in recent public administration research, such as that by Moynihan and Penday (2005) and Pandey and Garnett (2006). To measure goal ambiguity, this study used a summative index based on Rainey's (1993) scale. Decentralization was measured by the three-item scale developed by Aiken and Hage (1968) and modified by Moynihan and Penday (2005). All survey questionnaires used a 7-point Likert scale.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and results of the reliability test (Cronbach's α) and correlation analysis of the sample's variables. According to the reliability test results, the α values were between 0.74 and 0.95, indicating significant internal consistency among the survey items for measuring the variables. A correlation analysis was conducted to reveal basic relationships among variables, with special attention to the three key variables, POPS, RC, and TC. There were somewhat high negative correlation coefficients between POPS and OP (–0.659) and RC and OP (–0.673). TC was negatively related to OP. Previously, this study expected that task conflict positively affected organizational performance; however, the coefficient between TC and OP was –0.441. Although the size of the coefficient was less than that for relationship conflict, it is possible that task conflict may have a negative effect on organizational performance.

As discussed before, task conflict could be related to relationship conflict, and this connection between two types of organizational conflict could bring about task conflict having negative effects on organizational outcomes. Thus, it was important to analyze the effects of task conflicts on organizational performance to confirm the research hypothesis in a regression analysis. These results showed that organizational politics and relationship conflicts may have negative effects on organizational performance in government. From the correlation analysis results, we can expect that goal ambiguity has a negative effect on organizational performance. Decentralization is positively related to organizational performance, but the coefficient was not very high (0.403).

Table 3. Regression results.

Standardized coefficient	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Independent Variables							
Perceived organizational politics	-.343**				-.157*	-.149*	-.201**
Relationship conflict	-.402**				-.152*	-.111*	-.143*
Task conflict	-.064				-.053	-.050	-.034
Organization control variables (culture)							
Hierarchical culture		.147**			.114*	.007	.016
Developmental culture		.373**			.200*	.127*	.110*
Group culture		.355**			.152*	.132*	.189*
Rational culture		.141**			.175*	.157*	.123*
Organization control variables							
Decentralization			.219**			-.030	.078
Goal ambiguity			-.623**			-.277*	-.317**
Individual control variables							
Experience				.041			-.057
Gender dummy (1: male; 0: female)				.010			-.003
Race dummy (1: Caucasian; 0: other)				.142*			.040
MPA/MPP dummy (1: MPA and MPP; 0: other)				.028			-.017
R^2	.532	.573	.522	.024	.668	.712	.717
Adjusted R^2	.528	.568	.520	.011	.661	.704	.704
F	119.740**	104.163**	186.493**	1.822	88.331**	83.908**	56.487**

* $<.05$; ** $<.01$.

Regression results

To analyze the effects of organizational politics and conflicts on performance in government organizations, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed. Using hierarchical multiple regression analyses, it was possible to analyze the contributions above and beyond the first group of independent variables (organizational politics and conflicts), entered previously in the model to examine the effects of organizational culture variables and the other control variables, and to check incremental validity based on R^2 changes. In this research, there were seven steps in the analyses. Table 3 shows the results of the analyses.

The results indicated that organizational politics and relationship conflict negatively affect organizational performance. However, task conflict was not significant at the 0.05 level. In models five, six, and seven, while task conflict was not significant, organizational politics and relationship conflict were negatively associated with organizational performance. In model two, all of the types of organizational culture variable were significantly related to organizational performance; however, hierarchical culture was not significant in the last step. As for organizational control variables, although decentralization was not significant, goal ambiguity negatively affected organizational performance.

To test for multicollinearity problems in the models, it is important to check variance inflation factor (VIF) measurements. According to the results, all of the VIF values were under 3.00, so there was no apparent multicollinearity problem in the analyses. The results of model one showed that the variance accounted for in

the first three independent variables, R^2 was 0.532. In step five, R^2 was 0.668, and the change in variance accounted for 0.136. In the last model, R^2 was 0.717, and the change in variance accounted for 0.185. These results indicated that organizational politics and conflicts were important predictors of organizational performance and that these independent variables should be considered as essential factors in research regarding organizational performance in the public sector.

Discussion

In terms of the POPS, this study hypothesized that POPS was negatively related to organizational performance (Hypothesis 1). In the regression analyses, POPS was significantly negatively related to OP ($\beta = -0.201^{**}$). Thus, the results support Hypothesis 1.

Regarding task conflict (TC), this study hypothesized that task conflict was positively related to organizational performance (Hypothesis 2). In the regression analyses, task conflict was negatively associated with organizational performance but not statistically significantly so in the three models. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed by the regression analyses.

In terms of relationship conflict (RC), this study hypothesized that relationship conflict was negatively related to organizational performance (Hypothesis 3). The regression analyses show that relationship conflict has significant negative effects on organizational performance. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was confirmed by the regression analyses.

Thus, the research results of this study indicate strong overall support for the research model. In particular, the regressions can explain much of the workings inside the black box of the performance of government organizations. The R^2 statistics of the regressions demonstrate that these internal politics and organizational conflict variables should be considered when studying the organizational performance of governments.

Since Pfeffer (1981, 1992) stimulated research regarding the power and politics of organizations, some empirical studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between internal politics and the performance of private organizations. In public administration, however, only a few studies have been conducted, and political behaviors in public organizations have received little treatment as an important variable when studying public performance.

In this study, a perception of organizational politics significantly and negatively affected perceptual conflict management effectiveness and perceived organizational performance. These findings are consistent with the results of previous studies and show that a perception of organizational politics is a vital element related to organizational performance. Vigoda (2000a) concluded that “organizational politics may function as the silent enemy with organizations and can be even more destructive for public administration systems than for private organizations... the silent effect of internal politics can spill over beyond the formal boundaries of public organizations... to exercise lower level of performance” (p. 204). That is, employees of public organizations may experience higher levels of organizational politics and respond with more passive behavior, like neglect or apathy, which are less risky (Vigoda, 2000a).

As Vigoda concluded, it is important to note that this negative effect of organizational politics may bring about less motivation and job satisfaction among public employees; hence, they may have negative reactions regarding the internal politics of government organizations. In particular, many citizens have experienced passive and neglectful behaviors from public employees. These negative effects of internal politics may hamper both public service improvement and innovation in the public sector.

Furthermore, as far as could be found, the study by Hochwarter, Witt, and Kacmar (2000) and a couple of studies by Vigoda (2000b, 2000a) are the only ones that have examined the relationship between the perception of organizational politics and organizational performance. Since Ferris et al. (1989) suggested their basic

model of organizational politics, only a few studies have empirically tested their effects on organizational performance. The strong results of this study indicate that the relationships exist and that the internal politics factor will need to be considered when explaining organizational performance.

This study also found that organizational conflicts basically have negative effects on organizational performance. Based on the results of the previous research into organizational conflicts, this study classified organizational conflicts into either relationship conflicts or task conflicts. It may be expected that task conflict would have positive effects on organizational performance, based on previous studies (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; DeChurch & Marks, 2001). However, the results here do not support those prior.

Although previous studies found that task conflict had positive effects on organizational performance, as many researchers had argued, task and relationship conflict can be correlated and arouse negative aspects of organizational conflicts in each other (Amason & Sapienza, 1997). It is possible that some people may confuse task conflict with having relationship conflict. Furthermore, the negative relationship between task conflict and organizational performance is at least plausible considering the less constructive aspects of the two mutually correlated types of organizational conflicts. Simons and Peterson (2000) concluded that the benefit of task conflict would be increased with minimal danger of relationship conflict. Additionally, they were concerned that “the stimulation of task conflict as a primary intervention runs a high risk of unintentionally triggering relationship conflict, with all its attendant negative consequences” (Simons & Peterson, 2000, p. 109). Moreover, Amason and Schweiger (1994) pointed out that “encouraging disagreement may yield results that no better and may well be worse than avoiding conflict altogether” (p. 108). Thus, the results of this study suggest that although the distinction between the two types of organizational conflicts may provide more vivid descriptions and more appropriate prescriptions for managing conflict, their effects differ depending on the specific characteristics of each workplace.

As expected, relationship conflict has negative effects on organizational performance. This result is consistent with previous studies (Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). To learn more about the specific effects of the two types of organizational conflicts, further studies using multiple regression models and other statistical models that include each conflict management style as a dependent variable are needed.

In terms of organizational cultures, considering organizational culture as a “pattern of shared meanings of organizations” (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999),

developmental culture emphasizes growth, flexibility, change, and adaptation (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991). Thus, public organizations having higher levels of developmental culture may also have higher organizational performance. In contrast, hierarchical culture focuses on organizational control and control-oriented internal processes (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991). Thus, we may expect that hierarchical culture will yield less effective organizational performance. In the regression model, however, hierarchical culture positively affected organizational performance. Group and rational cultures are also positively associated with organizational performance. Rational culture is considered very important in promoting organizational effectiveness and performance improvement (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991); thus, it is natural that rational culture would positively affect organizational performance. In addition, group culture would bring about integration, teamwork, and trust (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991). Therefore, group culture positively affects organizational performance. As for control variables, decentralization had negative effects on organizational performance, but was not significant. Regarding goal ambiguity, the variable had negative effects on organizational performance. This result is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Chun & Rainey, 2005).

Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between politics, conflict, and the performance of government organizations. The empirical evidence indicated that organizational politics and conflicts have negative effects on organizational performance. As Farazmand (1999, p. 351) pointed out, organizational studies have “systematically ignored or overlooked” the normative aspects of organizational theory. Politics and conflicts are essential element in organizations and need to be managed properly to produce better outcomes.

Regarding several previous studies on public performance, few have focused on organizational politics, conflicts, conflict management, and their effects on organizational performance. Although politics and conflict are common in public organizations, we have little knowledge or understanding of their effects on organizational outcomes, especially considering their importance in the public sector. In particular, there has been no reported study that treated internal politics and organizational conflicts as factors in a model while testing their simultaneous effects on organizational performance. Thus, this study highlights the importance of an integrated and compositional approach to the study

of the organizational politics, conflicts, and performance of government organizations.

This study has some limitations. In particular, the empirical evidence is based on self-reported data from New Jersey state and local government employees. It is possible that the perspective of the respondents may be limited by the particular conditions that they have experienced. Furthermore, because this study used perceived indicators for measuring key variables, it may raise concerns about measurement validity. In addition, it is necessary to consider possible measurement issues related to perceived organizational politics. As Pfeffer (1981, 1992) argued, organizational politics may have a positive impact on organizational life. If so, as organizational conflicts could be classified into positive (task) and negative (relationship) conflicts, the existing POPS measurement adopted in this study would be an inadequate measurement of politics in organizations. Therefore, future research needs to study and refine the measurement for developing more accurate analyses between perceived organizational politics and the other various organizational outcome variables. For future research, the question of how to improve organizational performance by appropriate conflict management strategies deserves greater attention. This study does not answer the question, but it lays a foundation for this type of inquiry and suggests future studies on the relationship between conflict management, organizational performance, and other organizational factors, including trust, motivation, and satisfaction. Particularly, future studies should consider organizational learning and organizational citizenship behaviors as research variables for testing the relationships between organizational politics, conflict, and performance.

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