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**The Constructive Aspect of Political Behavior in Strategic Decision-Making:
The Role of Diversity**

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Abstract

While there have been extensive empirical and theoretical investigations on political behavior, most previous empirical studies have focused on political behavior as a negative force. In order to extend prior research, this study reconciles the upper echelons theory with the broaden-and-build theory and the work of the positive organizational behavior movement to investigate the antecedents and effects of constructive politics. It explores how different aspects of diversity influence constructive politics and the extent to which the latter contribute to decision performance, namely, decision success and decision pace. Data were drawn from 200 survey respondents in Dubai. The results supported not only the role of constructive politics in decision performance but also the role of demographic and competency diversity in constructive politics. The current research contributes to the exploration of constructive politics in decision-making and raises additional questions in an attempt to supply, with related research, significant missing portions of the political behavior story.

Keywords: Constructive politics; decision performance; diversity; Dubai; political behavior

1. Introduction

The political perspective on strategic decision-making focuses on the ways in which individuals involved in the decision-making process can affect it either through the power they possess or through other measures they take to exert influence such as cooptation and bargaining (Child et al., 2010; Dean & Sharfman, 1996). Traditionally, political behavior has been regarded as self-serving in nature even to the point where it contravenes norms (Ferris & Treadway, 2012; Harrell-Cook et al., 1999; Hochwarter, 2012). Comprehensive reviews in the strategic decision-making field (e.g., Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Elbanna, 2010) and in other fields such as personnel and human resource management (e.g., Ferris et al., 2002) document the deleterious impact of political behavior on a myriad of decision and work outcomes.

Therefore, the following question arises: “*Can political behavior play a constructive role in strategic decision-making*”. In other words can decision-makers practice political behavior to advance the fortunes of their organizations? Even in cases where this question has been addressed, the debate is often theory driven or so cursory that it offers only little useful advice for decision-makers. The interesting paradox regarding the role of politics in successful project management discussed by Pinto (2000) is an example of such theory-driven debate. Pinto argues that most of us tend to view political behavior with repugnance and regard engagement in political behavior as both personally distasteful and organizationally damaging. Furthermore, he claims that there is no denying that, for worse or better, political behavior is often one of the prime moving forces within organizations and that effective decision-makers are often able and willing to use appropriate political tactics to further their organizational goals. Given this and in order to reflect the current state of research concerning our research question above, we reviewed strategic decision-making literature on political behavior as summarized in Table 1. This review reveals that five out of the 25 studies identified in the literature address constructive/neutral aspects of political behavior (see Table 1). Moreover, with one exception (Elbanna et al., 2017), the five studies did not examine the role of constructive politics in decision outcomes. This therefore can be considered a less examined area of research to which the present paper, along with related recent research (e.g., Cheng et al., 2010; Landells & Albrecht, 2017), seeks to contribute.

Moreover, the way in which previous scholars conceptualized political behavior as a negative force may be questionable. For example, only one statement out of the six statements used by Elbanna and his colleagues to operationalize political behavior (Dayan et al., 2012; Elbanna et al., 2014) explicitly shows the use of political behavior for individual interests rather than those for the organization. The remaining five statements may be interpreted by respondents as possible tactics to defend either “personal goals” or “organizational ones”. Hence, although the theoretical assumptions of these studies are based on a negative view of politics, as several scholars used to do (e.g., Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Thanos et al., 2017), we are not sure how respondents perceived political behavior in these studies.

To conclude, rather than supposing that political behavior is inherently negative, destructive, or dysfunctional, this study is in sympathy with the perspective, of relatively recent and emerging research (e.g., Cheng et al., 2010; Ferris & Treadway, 2012), that political behavior can sometimes be constructive, positive, or functional. Buchanan (2008), for example, reports some functional roles of political behavior in an investigation of 250 British managers. Landells and Albrecht (2017) in their recent qualitative study of three Australian organizations conclude that organizational politics encompass both negative and positive consequences. Similarly, Dayan et al. (2012) recommend researchers to study both constructive and destructive dimensions of political behavior.

Our research was informed by another consideration that strategic decisions are usually made by people from different departments, composing diverse functional areas, demographic attributes, and competencies (Keller, 2001). However, with few exceptions, previous studies did not adopt models that consider the role of diversity in political behavior in the realm of strategic decision-making (Olson et al., 2007; Shepherd, 2014; Simons et al., 1999). To contribute to fill this research gap, we incorporated different forms of diversity as antecedents of constructive politics in the conceptual model of this study as shown in Figure 1.

Given the above context, this study seeks to contribute to research on constructive politics in four ways. First, we integrated a wealth of theoretical and empirical knowledge from strategic decision-making and other related research areas, such as human resource management, project management, and organizational behavior to develop a model of

constructive politics in decision-making drawing from three theoretical pillars, namely, the upper echelons theory, broaden-and-build theory, and positive organizational behavior. Such integration is essential because previous research on constructive politics in strategic decision-making remains sparse. The upper echelons theory provides the necessary theoretical foundation for Hypothesis 1 to explain how diversity influences constructive politics. This theory revolves around the assumption that backgrounds of decision-makers influence their interpretations of decision problems and thereby decision-making processes (Dimitratos et al., 2011; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Olson et al., 2007). Furthermore, the positive organizational behavior and broaden-and-build theories provide the essential theoretical base for Hypotheses 2 and 3. Drawing from theories concerning positive organizational behavior and positive organizational psychology (Luthans & Youssef, 2007), we argue that political behavior has several constructive dimensions, which can positively contribute to decision-making (Landells & Albrecht, 2017) and hence improve decision performance (Child et al., 2010). Frederickson's broaden and build theory (2001) provides another theoretical foundation for explaining the positive outcomes of constructive politics. This theory suggests that positive emotions promote the use of innovative, diverse, and exploratory modes of thinking; hence, they can broaden thought-action repertoires and the scope of attention and consequently decision performance (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

Second, some researchers have discussed the role of diversity in decision-making (e.g., Olson et al., 2007); however, no study has investigated how diversity, specifically, influences constructive politics. As a response to this gap, we highlight the importance of diversity for constructive politics and extend our investigation to informally explore the other roles that diversity may play in strategic decision-making. Third, an additional notable strength of the present study is its response to the call of related research (e.g., Shepherd, 2014) to assess empirically the impact of constructive politics on decision performance because there has been only little empirical support for such impact to date (Elbanna et al., 2017).

Fourth, our study extends the literature by examining a sample from a wholly new, increasingly important setting, Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In Dubai, most managerial positions, in the private sector, are occupied by expatriates, and a high level of

diversity is a main feature of the workforce (de Waal & Frijns, 2016). As concluded by de Waal and Frijns, the UAE context is not a typically Arab one, but very much diversified and characterized by features from both a typical Arab business setting and that of international business. The coexistence of both cultural business settings further justifies the importance of diversity as an antecedent of constructive politics in this study.

After this introduction, the paper proceeds as follows. The next section begins with a discussion on the nature of political behavior followed by the development of study hypotheses. Next, the research methods are described. We then present the study findings, concluding with their interpretations, managerial implications, limitations, and future research avenues.

Table 1 and Figure 1 here

2. Conceptual background

2.1 Nature of political behavior

Unsurprisingly, most decision-making scholars have often viewed political behavior negatively. This view is in line with the frequently shared view of organizational politics as destructive or dysfunctional and the argument that organizations would be better off if they could avoid political behavior so that everything would be “above board” and so that “back-room maneuvering” would not prevail (Fedor & Maslyn, 2002).

Nevertheless, Ferris et al. (2002) note that the reliance of research on negative definitions of political behavior has been a deficiency, insofar as people in organizations practice both “good” and “bad” politics, and these occur concurrently. In addition, seeing political behavior as a negative phenomenon assumes that decision-makers seek their own interests only without any regard for the interests of other individuals, teams, organizations, or society in general, which is not always true (Pfeffer, 2010). For example, several scholars have recognized that political behavior has both constructive and destructive sides and hence considered to be in effect neutral or unbiased (e.g., Ferris & Treadway, 2012; Hochwarter, 2012). Similarly, it was noted that political behavior can be considered constructive when it is the only possible way to do a work or to discuss issues that other

ways assume to be inappropriate at a particular time (Fedor & Maslyn, 2002). Such political behavior may not be authorized and may be pursued at least partially for own benefits, but its outcomes can be realized as useful to the decision-makers, the team, or the organization (Fedor et al., 2008). To illustrate, if someone takes part in a strategic alliance and bypasses the chain of command in order to consider a critical issue related to the alliance and its success, this could be an example of constructive political behavior in decision-making.

Given this discussion and considering related research (Child et al., 2010; Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Gandz & Murray, 1980), we neutrally define political behavior as “*intentional forms of behavior associated with the use of power and influence in order to serve the own interests of decision-makers or these of the organization*”. This neutral definition makes it clear that political behavior can be destructive or constructive. These two aspects of political behavior may be similar in being unsanctioned, but they can be differentiated by finding who reaps the benefit from them (Fedor et al., 2008). Moreover, we treat the two aspects as competing rather than complementary aspects of organizational decisions (Child et al., 2010). Hence, we can consider both destructive and constructive politics as the two opposite ends of a continuum of political behavior in decision-making, rather than as two different and orthogonal aspects of behavior. This view has been accommodated in the operationalization of constructive politics in our study and reveals that political behavior is in itself neutral until it is clear who benefits (Hochwarter, 2003).

2.2. Diversity and constructive politics

In this study, the upper echelons theory provides the necessary theoretical foundation to explain how diversity influences constructive politics. For instance, characteristics of managers, including diversity in their education, experience, competency, and functional background, can be realistic proxies for essential intellectual capabilities and consequently influence the way in which managers make decisions. These proxies have generally been used in previous research to delineate the antecedents of decision-making processes including political behavior (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014).

Although the role of diversity in constructive politics is of a particular importance as discussed above, some scholars have cautioned that the literature of strategic decision-making uses very heavy demographic diversity data, which may not fully capture the varying aspects of diversity (Knouse & Dansby, 1999). In other words, the decision process

may still differ regardless of the level of similarity in the demographic characteristics of decision-makers, as a result of other facets of diversity such as competency and functional diversity. Therefore, with demographic diversity, we also included functional and competency diversity in this study. Demographic diversity refers to the diversity of decision-makers in terms of gender, age, and nationality (Colquitt et al., 2002; Earley & Mosakowski, 2000); functional diversity is related to the number of functional backgrounds of decision-makers (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995); and competency diversity is related to the diversity of decision-makers in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities (Dayan et al., 2012).

Because strategic decisions are usually made by people with multifunctional backgrounds, a relationship between functional diversity and constructive politics is expected. Moreover, the decision-making team, particularly in Dubai, will probably show demographic differences, because decision-makers surely differ also in terms of longevity with the firm, age, nationality, etc. (de Waal & Frijns, 2016). Similarly, dissimilarity in decision-makers' functions and in their knowledge base for receiving ideas and insights to solve problems can be expected (Tekleab et al., 2016). Still, homogeneous, or less diversified, decision-makers may share similar attributes and competencies and hence similar views; this may not initiate the need to practice constructive politics. This argument concludes that diversity is more likely to stimulate the practice of constructive politics.

In a similar vein, decision-makers who have been differently trained or educated may objectively disagree with each other in interpreting data because of their diverse professional backgrounds (Bell et al., 2011). In such situations, diversity can be beneficial for supplying a wider base of ideas during the decision-making process and hence may enhance the practice of constructive politics. This discussion suggests that a high level of diversity among decision-makers facilitates the introduction of cognitive conflict in the decision-making process; this in turn can further generate constructive politics. Furthermore, decision-makers from the same organizational unit or function are more likely to inherently trust each other more than individuals of the "out-group" simply due to their shared functional backgrounds (Kramer, 1999). This can also apply to decision-makers from the same nationality, particularly in multi-ethnic settings such as Dubai. In

such cases of low levels of diversity, decision-makers are unlikely to practice constructive politics.

Empirically, Pettigrew (1973) has found that demographic diversity was related to greater rivalry and conflict among decision-makers, which trigger political behavior in strategic decisions. Dayan et al. (2012) report that functional diversity is positively related to political behavior. Similarly, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) indicate that lack of diversity, or demographic similarity, does not necessarily initiate political behavior. According to the competition theory, diversity may be advantageous by securing a high group performance (Mullen & Copper, 1994). Considering all these arguments and results along with the assumptions of upper echelons and competition theories, we predict that diversity will increase the possibility that managers will practice constructive politics during the decision-making process. Formally:

Hypothesis 1: (a) Functional diversity, (b) demographic diversity, and (c) competency diversity positively relate to the use of constructive politics in strategic decision-making.

2.3. Constructive politics and decision performance

The origin of positive organizational behavior research is the positive psychology movement, which was initiated by Martin Seligman and his colleagues (see, Seligman, 1998; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In the view of this movement, individuals try to move toward better citizenship, such as building a strong work ethic, responsibility, civility, altruism, tolerance, and moderation (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Given the fact that this movement focuses on building human strengths by changing the focus in psychology from dysfunctional mental illness to mental health, we follow Landells and Albrecht (2017) to integrate this movement into the realm of political behavior and claim that constructive politics can enhance decision performance. As argued by Cavanagh et al. (1981), ethics and organizational politics are inextricably linked, and hence, when decision-makers aspire to be good citizens, they are more likely to practice constructive politics.

Similarly, Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) find that positive emotions facilitate timely decisions, prevent redundancies in the search process, drive a focus on the important dimensions, and increase alternatives. Capitalizing on the problem-solving and coping properties of positive emotions (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), we argue that constructive politics can enhance decision performance. For example, appraising the strategic decision

process as politically constructive can help decision-makers to deploy cognitive and social skills in order to decode important information, elicit feedback about the utility of different problem-solving strategies, and expand the group's knowledge about the decision context (Child et al., 2010). Moreover, it can bring out decision-makers' positive emotions, which ultimately broaden the cognitive and emotional resources for effectively coping with stress and negative experiences (Aspinwall, 1998). People use several coping strategies such as goal-directed, problem-focused coping; positive reappraisal; and the infusion of positive meaning in ordinary events (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). This can further help to consider multiple angles of current problems (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) and, hence, contribute to better decision outcomes.

In addition to the above theoretical arguments, related research shows additional reasons to account for the possible positive impact of constructive politics on decision performance. First, constructive politics can encourage decision-makers to examine multiple perspectives and assumptions, ensuring that all decision sides are fully discussed (Elbanna et al., 2017). Second, constructive politics are more likely to be directed toward serving what is feasible in the circumstances of the time, rather than entrenched interests and positions within the organization. Decisions that arise from such processes are more likely, for example, to lead to a better understanding of environmental constraints (Dean & Sharfman, 1996), serve as an essential mechanism for organizational adaptation in a rapidly changing environment (Eisenhardt et al., 1997), and help firms to introduce new products to the market faster (Dayan et al., 2012).

Third, constructive politics can help to defuse destructive political actions. If managers, for instance, misuse information and choose to defend their own interests, they should expect to suffer when others who play constructive politics bring this to light (Elbanna, 2010). Constructive politics may also help decision-makers to consider some reasonable options, even if they oppose the interests of powerful people (Mintzberg, 1985). Fourth, constructive politics can be used as a type of "invisible underhand" to encourage the changes required to make a strategic decision, which are blocked by the legitimate systems of influence (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Finally, constructive politics can open the door for the implementation of a strategic decision (Zahra, 1987) by, for example,

enhancing the possibility of considering activities that relate to proper implementation, thus reducing uncertainty and increasing acceptance (Nutt, 1998).

From the above discussion, along with the arguments of broaden-and-build and positive organizational behavior theories, we hypothesize that constructive politics play a role in improving decision performance. Formally:

Hypothesis 2: Constructive politics are related positively to decision success.

Hypothesis 3: Constructive politics are related positively to decision pace.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling

Given the difficulty in selecting a probability sample in the Arab region, our data were collected using a purposive sample in 2012 from a free zone in Dubai. Out of a sample of 300 private companies, 200 companies responded (67% response rate). Of these, 78 companies (39%) had 15-50 employees, 89 companies (45%) had 51-100 employees, 19 companies (9%) had 101-150 employees, and 14 companies (7%) had 151-200 employees. Furthermore, 176 companies were foreign (88%), 22 companies were local (11%), and 2 companies were joint ventures (1%). Expatriates represented most of the employees in our sample (99%). The average number of employees was 73. Ninety four companies (47%) belonged to the manufacturing industry and 106 companies (53%) belonged to the service industry. The industries represented in the sample varied widely, e.g., switchgear, general trading, cranes, electrical material trading, elevators, and contracting. The average age of the sampled companies was 14 years.

The strategic decisions examined differed broadly, e.g., new investment, geographical expansion, new products, downsizing, and closing a branch. In terms of process, managers were approached for appointments, and data were collected using structured interviews. Of our respondents, 99% were male. All the respondents represented either top management (46%) or middle management (54%). Most respondents (97%) had a bachelor's degree or higher, e.g., MBA or PhD.

3.2. Operationalization

All variables were measured on a 5-point scale except functional diversity (the number of functions represented on the team), team size (the number of individuals in the team), industry type (a dummy variable), and firm size (the number of employees).

Given the different outcomes of strategic decisions (Hough & Ogilvie, 2005; Shepherd, 2014), decision performance in the present study is defined as *“the way a decision performs in terms of accomplishments or outcomes, not only on its original objectives as measured by decision effectiveness or success, but also on other aspects of accomplishments or outcomes such as pace/speed, creativity and propitiousness.”* Considering the multidimensionality of decision performance as shown in this definition, two aspects of decision performance were selected for the purposes of this study, namely, decision success and decision pace. Decision success serves as a measure of the achievements of decision objectives and its overall impact on firm performance, which can be considered as the minimum to measure, while decision pace is of a particular importance as an outcome of decision politics (Child et al., 2010; Eisenhardt, 1989).

Appendix 1 shows the statements used to measure decision success (Elbanna, 2010; Rodrigues & Hickson, 1995), decision pace (Lynn et al., 2000), constructive politics (Child et al., 2010; Dean & Sharfman, 1996; Mintzberg, 1985), and unfavorable environment (Dean & Sharfman, 1996). It is worth noting that conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) led to the elimination of one item from the decision pace scale, namely, *“this decision was made on or ahead of the planned date.”*

Following Brown and Eisenhardt (1995), we measured functional diversity as the number of functional areas (departments), which were represented on the team whose members were greatly and directly involved in making the decision rather than being ad hoc participants who were engaged only for a limited time. The measure of demographic diversity of the decision-making team was adapted from Colquitt et al. (2002). Respondents were asked to rate the diversity of the decision-making team on three dimensions: age, nationality, and gender. The measure of demographic diversity was created by averaging these three ratings. Competency diversity (knowledge, skills, and abilities) was adopted from McShane and Glinow (2009). The diversity measures ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 represents the lowest level of diversity and 5 represents the highest level.

Considering the possible impact of context on strategic decision-making (Elbanna et al., 2014; Papadakis et al., 2010; Shepherd & Rudd, 2014), we controlled for five contextual factors that represent four levels of context: decision level, namely, the level of agreement with the decision (Elbanna, 2010); decision-makers' level, namely, the team size (Akgün et al., 2007); firm level, namely, the firm size (Papadakis et al., 1998); and external environment level, namely, the industry type (Daniel et al., 2004) and environment favorability (Dean & Sharfman, 1996).

3.3. Reliability and common method bias

As shown in Table 2, the coefficients of Cronbach's alpha range from 0.74 to 0.86; this indicates a reasonable level of internal consistency for our study variables. Because our data were collected from a single source, we tried to obviate the limitations of possible same-source bias and social desirability. This was done before data collection by (1) reversing the scale anchors in some places; (2) assuring complete confidentiality and anonymity; (3) using objective data to measure four variables: functional diversity, industry type, team size, and firm size; (4) placing the dependent variables after the independent ones to make it difficult for survey respondents to guess our hypotheses (Krishnan et al., 2006); and (5) adding a control variable to determine to what extent respondents agreed with the decisions in which they were involved because their answers might be affected by their level of agreement with the decisions studied. For example, respondents who do not agree with a decision may tend to devalue its outcomes.

After data collection, three tests were conducted to determine the extent of method variance in the current data. First, results from a Harmon one-factor test suggested the presence of four factors; this indicates that common method effects did not likely influence the results observed in this investigation. Second, when CFA was applied to Harman's single-factor model (Sanchez & Brock, 1996), the model fit indices were considerably worse than those when it was applied to the measurement model. These results demonstrate that a single-factor model is unacceptable. Third, following Elangovan and Xie (1999), our measurement model was re-estimated with all the indicator variables loading on a general method factor. Although the measurement with method factor model fits the data better than the measurement model does, the improvement was slight, and the factors' loadings

were significant even after the method effects were partialled out. This also suggests that any possible common method bias is trivial. The results of the above tests clarify that common method variance is not a pervasive concern in this study.

4. Results

Table 2 shows that the correlation coefficients are all well below 0.80; therefore, we can safely conclude that there is no substantial multicollinearity problem within our data. It also shows that the mean score of constructive politics in the present study is higher (mean = 4.04) than those in related studies in other countries such as Greece, Egypt (Elbanna et al., 2014; Thanos et al., 2017), the UK (Shepherd, 2014), and the USA (Dean & Sharfman, 1996). The reason for this difference may be that a neutral definition of political behavior has been adopted in this study, unlike that employed in previous research. Next, we discuss the two-step modeling approach to use structural equation modeling (SEM) in the analysis of our data.

4.1. Assessment of the measurement model

Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS AMOS version 18. We screened the measures by assessing their reliability, validity, and uni-dimensionality. As shown above, the reliability tests demonstrate acceptable results. Content validity, before the data collection, is supported by the previous literature. Moreover, the average variances extracted (AVE) are above the recommended value of 0.50, ranging from 0.53 to 0.63 (see Table 2).

The measures were also subjected to a full CFA, where variables were included in one CFA model, to verify the validity and uni-dimensionality of the measures. Standardized factor loadings for all item measures were more than 0.50, ranging from 0.55 to 0.99. Hence, a satisfactory convergent validity was established for the items. The results discussed above and those on goodness-of-fit indices shown in Table 3 ($\chi^2 = 95.80$, $df = 36$, $\chi^2/df = 2.66$, $GFI = 0.92$, $IFI = 0.94$, $CFI = 0.94$, $RMSEA = 0.09$, $SRMR = 0.07$, $CI = 0.07-0.11$, $PClose = 0.00$) demonstrate that the measurement model is acceptable.

4.2. Structural model

The hypothesized model was then examined using SEM (the maximum likelihood estimation technique). The results in Table 3 indicate a good fit by most indices ($\chi^2 = 203.28$, $df = 92$, $\chi^2/df = 2.21$, $GFI = 0.90$, $IFI = 0.93$, $CFI = 0.92$, $RMSEA = 0.08$, $SRMR$

= 0.06, CI = 0.06–0.09, PClose = 0.00). Contrary to expectation, functional diversity did not demonstrate a significant association with constructive politics ($\beta = -0.03$, ns) (see Table 4). Thus, Hypothesis 1(a) was not supported. The path from demographic diversity to constructive politics was significant but in the opposite direction of our expectation ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$), which does not lend support to Hypothesis 1(b) either. Hypothesis 1(c) was supported in the hypothesized direction because the path from a competency diversity ($\beta = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$) to constructive politics was significantly positive.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 hold that constructive politics are related positively to decision success and decision pace, respectively. Consistent with expectations, the loadings of the path between constructive politics and both decision success ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$) and decision pace ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$) were significantly positive. Thus, Hypotheses 2 and 3 are supported.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 here

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretations

In accordance with the general support for the upper echelon theory in the strategic decision-making context (e.g., Dimitratos et al., 2011; Olson et al., 2007), our findings present evidence in favor of the incorporation of decision-makers' characteristics (namely, diversity) in the context of decisions. Similarly, consistent with the literature on positive psychology and specifically on positive organizational psychology (Luthans & Youssef, 2007) and the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), our results show that a politically constructive process of decision-making can be a valuable resource for successful decision-making (e.g., Elbanna et al., 2017). More specifically, the following relationships derived from the study model were supported:

- Higher competency diversity is positively related to constructive politics (H1c).
- Higher levels of constructive politics are positively related to both decision success (H2) and decision pace (H3).

Now, we try to interpret the unexpected results concerning both functional and demographic diversities. Contrary to our expectation, constructive politics are not affected by functional diversity. Similarly, Sharfman and Dean (1997) do not report a significant relationship between functional diversity (heterogeneity) and flexibility in strategic decision-making. A potential justification for this insignificant result would be the possibility of a complex relationship between diversity and constructive politics in particular and the group decision-making process in general. For example, Dayan et al. (2012) argue that there are three different views on this relationship, namely, a positive effect (Pettigrew, 1998), a negative effect (Mullen & Copper, 1994), and a complex effect (Knouse & Dansby, 1999). Our results support this argument and reveal that even though there is a positive relationship between competency diversity and constructive politics, the relationship between demographic diversity and constructive politics is negative and that between functional diversity and constructive politics is missing.

We claim that there is another dimension of complexity, which can further explain the conflicting research results in a way that the conceptualization of complexity provided by Dayan and his colleagues, mentioned above, cannot. This is that the role and outcomes of diversity in the decision process in general, or in constructive politics in particular, may take three shapes, namely, a determinant of the decision process, a determinant of decision outcomes, and a moderator of the linkage between the decision process and its outcomes. To explore this argument, we conducted an additional analysis, as shown in Table 5, and concluded that the role of diversity is more complex than what has so far been examined in this study or in related research. For example, the three types of diversity in our study moderate the relationships between constructive politics and decision success, while competency diversity is the only moderator for the linkage of constructive politics with decision pace. Similarly, competency diversity is the only antecedent of decision performance. These findings, along with the results of hypotheses testing presented above, show that the role of diversity in the decision-making process and outcomes is not simple.

A third explanation is that functional diversity is a necessary but may not be a sufficient condition for practicing politics, and hence, our model may miss some moderating variables that render the “conditions ripe for politics” as Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) note.

Table 5 here

Surprisingly, demographic diversity is negatively related to constructive politics. A possible justification of this result is that decision-makers with higher levels of demographic diversity may see that they miss the similarities and commonalities needed for effective collaboration, focus on individual or subgroup identities, and may direct exclusionary communications and become biased toward others (Larkey, 1996); this diminishes constructive politics and enhances negative politics instead (Dayan et al., 2012). In the same vein, in the case of demographic diversity, Earley and Mosakowski (2000) argue that subgroup formation, social categorization, and in-group biasing are more likely to arise because few commonalities exist among decision-makers. At this point, decision-makers may not see their disagreements in a positive light and may disrespect their differences, leading to less constructive politics. Our unexpected results, along with the claim of Shepherd and Rudd (2014) that there is mixed evidence on the effect of demographic diversity on the decision process, show the importance of more closely examining the role of demographic diversity in constructive politics in the future. Moreover, the coexistence of both Western and Arab cultures in the UAE business setting and consequently the significance of diversity in this setting shows our need to deeply examine the impact of culture on the relationship between diversity and constructive politics in the UAE setting.

5.2. Managerial relevance

From a practical perspective, a study such as ours can help decision-makers to understand what good politics are, what antecedents affect them, what they can do, and what can be done with them to secure organizational benefits. For example, our study shows that political behavior is not inherently evil or detrimental; rather, its characteristic depends on its use, and hence, successful managers should be aware that political behavior can be deployed constructively and lead to positive effects on decision outcomes. More specifically, managers need to realize that competency diversity can enhance the practice of constructive politics; this in turn positively influences decision performance. However, high levels of demographic diversity diminish the practice of constructive politics; hence, top management needs to consider this finding when it forms decision-making teams. This

discussion shows that a good understanding of political behavior can help to play down its destructive manifestations and instead use it to widen debate and discussion on the best interests of organizations and consequently of people.

5.3. Research limitations

Our study has several limitations, which should be highlighted. First, we assume that the political tactics needed for constructive politics are the same as those needed for destructive politics. Future research should explore this assumption further to check its validity. Second, we cannot claim that the three aspects of diversity included in our conceptual model are entirely representative of diversity. An alternative model comprising a well thought-out set of other aspects of diversity, such as diversity in terms of attitudes, experience, and cognition (e.g., Miller et al., 1998; Shepherd & Rudd, 2014), might yield different results. A future longitudinal study is also recommended to explore how the role of diversity in constructive politics evolves over time because cross-sectional data may not help to understand such evolution.

Third, although it well suits the purpose of this study, another limitation is its examination of one antecedent only of constructive politics, namely, diversity. As an attempt to enrich our knowledge on political behavior and what influence its *direction* (choice), *intensity* (effort), and *duration* (persistence) (Kapoutsis, 2016), future research needs to develop more integrative models for use in the broader context of constructive politics, based on the existing relevant reviews (e.g., Papadakis et al., 2010; Shepherd & Rudd, 2014), along with related research on political behavior in general (e.g., Ferris & Treadway, 2012; Thanos et al., 2017) and constructive politics in particular (e.g., Cheng et al., 2010; Elbanna et al., 2017; Landells & Albrecht, 2017).

Fourth, the measures employed in this study were cross-sectional and assessed within a survey format, thus raising the possibility of common method bias (e.g., Thanos et al., 2017; Walter et al., 2012). However, common method bias is most probably not a serious limitation of the present study because of the procedures adopted and the results of analyses on common method bias reported earlier. Fifth, a similar limitation confining the generalizability of the study results is the inability to examine non-response bias because the relevant data were not available. Although the response rate in this study was high

(67%) compared to that in a similar research, this limitation should be considered in future studies at an early stage of planning for data collection to verify the representativeness of the study samples (see for example, Papadakis, 1998; Walter et al., 2012).

Sixth, the close relationship between team size and functional diversity ($r = 0.71^{**}$) reported in Table 2 may be an indication of a collinearity concern in this study. However, we do not suppose that this concern has affected the relationships examined in the structural model because results reported in both Table 2 ($r = 11$, ns) and Table 4 ($\beta = -0.01$, ns) show insignificant relationships between functional diversity and constructive politics. Seventh, the sample came primarily from a new setting, Dubai, where companies are relatively small, thereby restricting the generalizability of the results to other, more diverse, samples.

5.4. Future research

In addition to addressing the above limitations, several promising avenues for future research are identified. First, although our scale of constructive politics had appropriate internal reliability, it would also benefit from further development to better conceptualize and operationalize constructive politics, so as to offer a more dynamic, neutral, and eclectic view of political behavior and reveal the unsystematic aspect of reality. For example, it seems insufficient to judge constructive politics solely by whether they facilitate the attainment of organizational goals, as we do in this study. By consulting related research (e.g., Buchanan, 2008; Elbanna et al., 2017; Landells & Albrecht, 2017; Mintzberg, 1985), future researchers can consider other aspects of constructiveness as shown in Figure 2. These aspects, for instance, include decision interpretations (e.g., reactive, reluctant, strategic, and integrated) (Landells & Albrecht, 2017); decision process dynamics (e.g., manipulating and undermining others, and building networks and coalitions); decision content (e.g., examining different facets of the decision); decision context (e.g., considering decision environment); decision resources (e.g., saving time, energy, and effort); decision implementation (e.g., getting things accomplished and promoting necessary changes); and decision outcomes (e.g., beneficial individual, group and organizational consequences). Such research can help us to better capture how decision-makers perceive, define, describe, and practice constructive politics (for developing relevant constructs of constructive politics, please refer to Fedor & Maslyn, 2002; Kapoutsis et al., 2017). Moreover, because cognitive or task conflict (Olson et al., 2007), positive emotions (Fredrickson & Joiner,

2002), and constructive politics are functional, we also call for research to differentiate and examine the nature of relationships between these constructs.

Figure 2 here

Second, although there is a chance that the personal goals of decision-makers may be in line with those of their organizations, our operationalization of constructive politics assumes that the simultaneous pursuit of both types of goal by different people at the same time is impossible. In this way, we oversimplify this complicated concept. For example, departing from March's notion of exploration and exploitation as continuity variables (March, 2006), other researchers have conceptualized these as orthogonal variables (e.g., Nerkar, 2003). Similarly, future research may explore the possibility of operationalizing constructive and destructive politics as two different aspects of political behavior and thus find them simultaneously achievable, that is, they are orthogonal variables. Further, can we imagine a situation in which an individual practice political behavior as a way of simultaneously defending both personal and organizational benefits? This is another interesting question for future research.

Third, drawing insights from studies that concentrate on diversity as a predictor of firm performance (e.g., Van Knippenberg et al., 2004), researchers can extend the research on the team diversity-performance relationship into the realm of strategic decision-making to shed more light on the association between diversity and decision performance. As Tekleab et al. (2016) argue, there are two perspectives or theoretical traditions about the impact of diversity on the effectiveness of team members in association with making decisions. The first theoretical perspective argues that diverse teams negatively influence the quality of a team's performance; this is supported by several theories such as the similarity-attraction approach, social categorization theory, and social identity theory (Tekleab et al., 2016). The second perspective, as supported by the informational diversity-cognitive resource perspective (Cox & Blake, 1991), proposes that diversity helps teams or decision-makers to improve group performance. Empirically, there is a similar support for all the possible relationships between diversity and team performance (Tekleab et al., 2016). This shows that the role of diversity in constructive politics is more complex than a simple relationship

(see, Van Knippenberg et al., 2004); therefore, future research needs to test the conditions in which the expected negative or positive impact of different aspects of diversity on constructive politics is derived.

Similarly, while a meta-analysis (Bell et al., 2011) proposes that diversity is a key determinant of performance, it may be unlikely to completely take on board the diversity-outcome relationship without opening the “black box” of decision processes (van Dijk et al., 2012), as also suggested by the input-process-outcome model of team effectiveness (McGrath, 1984). Simons et al. (1999), for example, report that the comprehensiveness of strategic decision-making partially mediates the relationship between the demographic diversity of decision-makers and firm performance. Therefore, future research should explore whether constructive politics serve as a mediator in the diversity-decision outcomes relationships.

Fourth, considering the recent work of Kapoutsis (2016), scholars might well consider the role of the largely under-investigated variables of political will and political prudence in decision politics to better understand how politics work and hence improve the practice of political behavior and mitigate its risks. Fifth, although the upper echelons theory and the broaden-and-build theory are relatively well-established theoretical pillars in the strategic management and psychology literature, both theories along with positive organizational behavior are less researched theories in the political behavior arena in general and constructive politics in particular. Therefore, further research drawn from these theories is needed to bring a deeper understanding with regard to constructive politics in organizations.

Sixth, future research that examines questions such as the following have the potential to address important research gaps: is there an interaction between constructive and destructive politics? How do they interact? What is the impact of this interaction on decision performance? What is the possibility for an individual to switch between constructive and destructive politics? What are the determinants of this switch? Finally, discussing and tracing the questionable impact of decision performance on firm performance, considering the effect of other determinants of firm performance, needs more research efforts (Nutt & Wilson, 2010; Papadakis et al., 2010).

6. Conclusion

Because organizational politics permeate multiple disciplines, we draw from the literature of psychology, organizational behavior, and strategy to provide the theoretical foundations needed to explain the antecedents and impact of constructive politics. Given this, we trust that this research effort will be seen as an essential step in understanding constructive politics in decision-making. The study has shown that the relationship between diversity and constructive politics is rather complex and that constructive politics can have a positive role in predicting successful and speedy decisions. However, we do not believe that this study, along with our current knowledge on constructive politics, enables us to make a universal theory of political behavior, e.g., in favor of either continuity or orthogonality; constructiveness or destructiveness. We rather think that this study represents an initial attempt to understand the role of constructive politics, and it ends with more questions than answers. This may inspire additional conceptual and empirical work, which promises substantial real-world significance for teaching us how constructive politics might serve as a key to enhance decision performance. It is hoped that this study will serve in this capacity.

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Table 1**Empirical research on political behavior in strategic decision-making**

Study	Aspects of politics		Research design	
	Destructive	Constructive/ neutral	Quantitative	Qualitative
Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988)	✓			✓
Zahra (1987)		✓	✓	
Dean and Sharfman (1993, 1996)	✓		✓	
Roberto (2004)	✓			✓
Cheng et al. (2010)		✓	✓	
Dayan et al (2012)	✓		✓	
Walter et al. (2012)	✓		✓	
Bailey and Peck (2013)	✓			✓
Tsanis (2013)		✓		✓
Papadakis and his colleagues (2014; 1998; 2002; 1998)	✓		✓	
Galanou and Farrag (2014)	✓		✓	
Kreutzer et al. (2014)	✓		✓	
Shepherd (2014)	✓		✓	
Stanczyk et al. (2015)	✓			✓
Elbanna and his colleagues (2010, 2016; 2015; 2014)	✓		✓	
Elbanna et al. (2017)		✓	✓	
Landells and Albrecht (2017)		✓		✓
Thanos et al. (2017)	✓		✓	
Total (25)	20	5	19	6

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Mean	4.37	3.62	4.04	3.35	1.97	4.57	5.12	1.53	1.79	4.47	3.58
S.D.	0.57	0.89	0.83	1.25	1.00	0.71	2.47	0.50	0.25	0.67	0.98
Cronbach's alpha	0.75	0.76	0.86								0.74
AVE	0.53	0.63	0.62								0.63
1. Decision success	1										
2. Decision pace	0.28**	1									
3. Constructive politics	0.30**	0.48**	1								
4. Functional diversity	0.20**	-0.03	0.11	1							
5. Demographic diversity	-0.13	-0.29**	-0.44**	-0.11	1						
6. Competency diversity	0.21**	0.46**	0.75**	0.12	-0.25**	1					
7. Team size	0.21**	0.05	0.15*	0.71**	-0.16*	0.17*	1				
8. Industry type	-0.00	-0.06	-0.09	0.11	0.02	-0.04	0.05	1			
9. Firm size (log)	0.05	-0.13	-0.05	0.23**	-0.13	-0.14	0.11	-0.01	1		
10. Level of agreement	0.33**	0.17*	0.37**	0.01	-0.27**	0.20**	0.10	-0.10	0.22**	1	

11. Unfavorable environment	0.01	0.44**	0.27**	0.01	-0.20**	0.34**	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.05	1
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N=200; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

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Table 3
Goodness-of-fit indices

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	CI	PClose
Measurement model	95.80	36	2.66	0.92	0.94	0.94	0.09	0.07	0.07–0.11	0.00
Structural model	203.28	92	2.21	0.90	0.93	0.92	0.08	0.06	0.06–0.09	0.00

Table 4
Standardized parameter estimates

Path From	Path to		
	Constructive politics	Decision success	Decision pace
Functional diversity	-0.03		
Demographic diversity	-0.31**		
Competency diversity	0.70**		-0.03
Team size	-0.02	0.20*	-0.02
Industry type	-0.01	0.01	-0.05
Firm size	-0.05	-0.01	-0.13
Level of agreement	0.12*	0.32**	0.04
Unfavorable environment		-0.12	0.36**
Constructive politics		0.28*	0.47**
R^2	0.77**	0.28**	0.51**

Note: N=200, *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 5
Different roles of diversity in strategic decision-making

Diversity type	Diversity role				
	Antecedent			Moderator	
	Constructive politics	Decision success	Decision pace	Decision success	Decision pace
Functional diversity	No	No	No	Yes	No
Demographic diversity	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Competency diversity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Appendix 1

Construct	Statements
Decision success	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Our organization was successful in achieving the original objectives of this decision. 2. How would you describe the impact of this decision on the performance of your organization? 3. In general, how do you assess this decision now?
Decision pace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This decision was made in less time than is considered normal and customary for our organization. 2. Top management was pleased with the time it took us to take this decision. 3. This decision was made on or ahead of the planned date.
Constructive politics	<p>(1 = personal goals, 5 = organizational goals)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The decision-makers used their power to defend their ... 2. The decision-makers used bargaining to defend their ... 3. The decision-makers formed alliances with each other to enhance their ... 4. The decision-makers controlled meetings related to this decision, e.g., the meeting agenda, its date and time, to defend their ...
Unfavorable environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We faced negative unanticipated environmental conditions during the implementation of this decision, which hindered its success. 2. Environmental conditions following this decision did not favor its success.

Highlights

- Political behavior in strategic decision-making is multidimensional.
- Diversity of decision-makers has an impact on constructive politics.
- Political behavior can play a good role in the strategic decision-making process.
- Managers can constructively practice political behavior.