



Beyond the Dark Side: Positive Appraisals of Organizational Politics and the Role of Political Skill

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research with human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation was voluntary. The research posed minimal risk, and participants' confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between employees' Perceptions of Organizational Politics (POP) and their engagement within Indian higher education institutions. Guided by the Challenge–Hindrance Stressor Framework and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, it also investigates the mediating role of political skill—the ability to understand and influence others. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 227

university employees through validated scales measuring POP, political skill, and engagement. Mediation analysis in JAMOVI showed that POP has a direct positive impact on employee engagement, indicating that politics, when appraised as a challenge, can enhance involvement at work. Political skill was also identified as a significant partial mediator, explaining 15.4% of the total effect, with both mediation paths positive and significant. These findings challenge the dominant negative narrative around organizational politics, suggesting that politically skilled employees can transform political demands into opportunities that build resources and strengthen engagement.

Keywords: *Organizational Politics, Engagement, Political Skill, Challenge, Gain Spiral*

1. Introduction

Beyond the Dark Side: Positive Appraisals of Organizational Politics and the Role of Political Skill

The concept of organizational politics has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry. Initially viewed as a detrimental force within the workplace, the perspective has evolved to recognize it as a double-edged sword capable of yielding both harm and benefit (Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010). This duality underscores the complex nature of power and influence within organizations. These dynamics are not, in themselves, inherently political; rather, as Mayes and Allen (1977) argued, they only become "political" when they are perceived as being exercised in a self-serving manner. This distinction highlights the critical role of perception, where the politics does not reside in the mere presence of power itself but in the ways its use is interpreted by individuals.

This focus on subjectivity has led to the development of the concept of Perception of Organizational Politics (POP). POP reflects a subjectively experienced phenomenon (Gandz & Murray, 1980; Ferris et al., 1989), where informal influence and power dynamics may be seen as political by some employees while going unnoticed or being accepted as legitimate by others. Crucially, scholars have repeatedly shown that this subjective experience has a stronger effect on employees than the actual level of politics present, as it is this perception that ultimately shapes cognitive and behavioural responses (Ferris et al., 1989; Vigoda, 2000b). Consequently, individuals assess these political actions by subjectively evaluating the risks and rewards relative to their personal goals and circumstances. While some individuals may perceive these political actions as harmful, others may recognise potential personal or professional benefits (Eldor, 2016).

This recognition of POP's influence has prompted extensive research into its relationship with a variety of job outcomes, with key attention directed toward employee engagement. Engagement has been increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of organizational effectiveness and a key differentiator for high-performing cultures (Harter et al., 2002). Defined by Kahn (1990) as the extent to which employees bring their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into their role performance, engagement is characterized by a positive, fulfilling work-related state of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged employees are not merely content; they are highly involved in and enthusiastic about their work, displaying a willingness to go above and beyond their formal duties for the benefit of the organization (Saks, 2006; Rich et al., 2010). Given its established links to improved productivity, higher retention, and enhanced performance (Khwaja & Yang, 2022; (Gede & Huluka, 2024; Alnagbi et al., 2025), a deeper understanding of the factors influencing employee engagement is critical for both researchers and practitioners. Building on this foundation, the current study investigates the link between organizational politics and employee engagement to better understand the conditions under which politics may foster or undermine work involvement.

At this point, the research introduces a mediating variable- political skill- to examine the dynamic between perception of politics and employee engagement from a fresh perspective. This mediation raises questions such as, can political skill help employees sustain or even enhance engagement in the face of organizational politics, or does the presence of politics activate an employee's political skill? Ferris et al. (2005) define political skill as the capacity to accurately perceive and understand others in the workplace and to leverage that insight to influence their actions in ways that advance personal and professional goals. Such skill prepares individuals to navigate complex and ambiguous social situations, making it particularly relevant in contexts characterized by organizational politics.

The influence of organizational politics is not confined to the corporate world; it is also prevalent in educational institutions. Research universities have been described as environment where political behaviour and informal deal-making are common rather than being purely rational decision-making bodies (Lawrence & Ott, 2012; Baldrige, 1971). Yet very little research has explored the consequences of organizational politics in the Indian higher education sector. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how organizational politics shapes employee engagement in Indian higher education institutions, and whether political skill mediates this relationship.

1.1 *Theoretical Background*

The Challenge-Hindrance Stressor Framework serves as one of the foundational theoretical models for this paper's analysis. The framework classifies work-related demands into two categories: challenge stressors, which employees perceive as opportunities for growth and achievement, and hindrance stressors, which are seen as obstacles that prevent goal attainment and cause personal loss. Originally, the challenge–hindrance stressor framework positioned organizational politics as a hindrance stressor that depletes employees' resources and obstructs personal growth (LePine et al., 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2007). However, more recent research emphasizes that stressors should not be rigidly classified, as they are inherently subjective and dynamic in nature (Horan et al., 2020). Whether a stressor is experienced as a challenge or hindrance depends largely on individual perceptions. This argument can be substantiated with the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which suggests that stress is not inherent in the situation itself but is the outcome of a dynamic interaction between the person and their environment. A work stressor may be perceived as a hindrance when it blocks goal achievement, but the same stressor may be appraised as a challenge if it is seen as an opportunity for mastery and growth. In line with this evolving view of the challenge–hindrance model, this paper seeks to understand organizational politics through the lens of subjective appraisal.

From this perspective, organizational politics can also be framed as a challenge stressor. Politics can present itself as an opportunity disguised as a challenge—one that employees must navigate in order to grow within the organization. This process, in turn, can activate employee engagement as they work to successfully manoeuvre through the political landscape. Moreover, when employees possess resources such as political skill, they are more likely to interpret political behaviour as an opportunity to demonstrate competence and progress within the organization. This ability to successfully navigate political dynamics can foster a sense of control and influence, thereby enhancing engagement. Thus, politics can be viewed from a more positive angle—as a motivating force that encourages employees to invest more deeply in their work.

Another model is the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model that offers a useful lens for understanding organizational politics. The model categorizes job characteristics into two broad categories: demands and resources. Job demands refer to aspects of work that “require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Demerouti et al., 2001b). From this perspective, organizational politics can be framed as a job demand compelling employees to invest mental

and physical effort to navigate. In such a situation, political skill can act as a valuable personal resource, as employees who are politically skilled are able to manage such demands more effectively (Cullen et al., 2015).

Complementing this view, is the Conservation of resources (COR) theory which emphasizes that individuals are motivated to acquire as well as protect valuable resources. These resources can come in tangible form (e.g., salary, workplace) and intangible form (e.g., social support, recognition). Although much of COR theory highlights the consequences of resource loss, it also underscores the significance of resource gain and the potential for a gain spiral. Gain spiral occurs when initial resources facilitate the accumulation of further resources (Hobfoll, 2001). These spirals can generate a reinforcing cycle of enhanced well-being, energy, and engagement. (Salanova et al., 2010)

Within organizational settings, the idea of gain spiral becomes particularly relevant when considering the role of political skill. Employees with good political skills can transform the challenge of organizational politics into opportunities —by forging alliances, cultivating social support, or strategically influencing decision-making. Such actions allow them to secure additional resources to their pool. As these resources accumulate, employees not only sustain but also amplify their energy and motivation, fostering deeper engagement at work. Hence, political skill functions as a catalyst for resource gain, enabling individuals to convert potentially draining demands into opportunities for growth. By doing so, it not only buffers the negative effects of organizational politics (Brouer et al., 2011), but also unleashes its potential benefits, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of resource accumulation.

2. Review Of Literature and Hypothesis formulation

Perception of Organizational Politics and Employee Engagement

In previous research, POP has been found to have a positive relationship with job stress and turnover intention, while showing an inverse relationship with job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment (Miller et al., 2008; Bedi & Schat, 2013; Asrar-Ul-Haq et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2009; Ahmad-Mughal et al., 2017). This has largely placed politics under a negative spotlight, highlighting its detrimental effects on organizations. However, in more recent times, an opposing perspective has emerged, emphasizing that politics can also have positive, constructive outcomes, such as enhancing productivity, fostering innovation, and pushing organizations beyond the status quo (Ellen et al., 2013; Landells & Albrecht, 2015). Based on the principle that the ends can justify the means, organizational politics may be positive when it motivates individuals to take actions that safeguard their own

interests. Importantly, when those individual interests align with broader organizational objectives, political behaviour can be functional rather than destructive (Fedor et al., 2007).

Similarly, when examining the relationship between perception of organizational politics and employee engagement, findings have been mixed. It was originally believed that where favouritism and inequitable practices dominate, employees are prone to disengagement, remaining physically present but psychologically and emotionally detached from their work (Rosen et al., 2009; Cullen et al., 2014). For instance, Tufail (2022) reported a negative association between organizational politics and employee engagement, whereas Landells and Albrecht (2019) found that organizational politics does not directly diminish engagement but exerts its influence indirectly. Yet, consistent with findings on other outcomes, some scholars argue that politics can also play a constructive role: among employees driven by self-interest, a politically charged environment may encourage adaptive strategies and proactive behaviours that enhance engagement (Eldor, 2016). In other words, the challenges and uncertainties inherent in political environments can be leveraged by employees who are willing to embrace them.

Acknowledging these nuanced dynamics, it is plausible that perceptions of organizational politics may not be uniformly detrimental. Building on this emerging perspective, we propose that perceptions of organizational politics may, in fact, be positively associated with employee engagement. Hence, this study hypothesizes:

H1: Perception of Organizational Politics has a positive relationship with employee engagement.

Political Skill as a Mediator

Past research has suggested that organizational politics is positively associated with political skill (Jabid et al., 2021), while also suggesting that employees who possess high levels of political skill tend to exhibit stronger performance and greater engagement (Hochwarter, 2012; Bing et al., 2011b; Takeuchi et al., 2021c). These insights point to political skill as a promising mediator in the relationship between the perception of organizational politics and employee engagement. For instance, Ahmad-Mughal et al. (2017) examined how political skill operates in politically charged environments and found that the association between perceptions of organizational politics (POP) and job satisfaction is indirectly significant through employees' political skill. Their findings suggest that politically skilled employees are better able to interpret, adapt to, and even capitalize on political dynamics, thereby reducing the adverse impact of politics on work attitudes. In contexts where organizational politics is strongly perceived—often weakening the social fabric and fostering mistrust—employees with

high political skill may not only withstand these challenges but may also treat such environments as opportunities to advance personal or professional interests.

The bulk of prior research has conceptualized political skill primarily as a moderator that buffers the negative effects of politics on work outcomes (Atshan et al., 2021; Wang & Chen, 2022; Crawford et al., 2019; Brouer et al., 2010; Khan et al., 2021). By contrast, relatively fewer studies have examined its mediating role, which can shed light on how and why organizational politics translates into specific employee behaviours. This imbalance highlights an opportunity to extend existing scholarship by positioning political skill as a mediator. Hence this research hypothesizes that:

H2: Political skill of an employee positively mediates the relationship between Perception of Organizational politics and Employee Engagement

3. Methodology

The potential participants were approached and informed about the research and its goals through an email or a face-to-face interaction. Participants also explained that this study would pose no more than minimal risk to them (Committee on Revisions to the common rule for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research in Behavioral and Social Sciences et al., 2014). Once agreed upon, consent was taken from the interested participants after explaining their rights.

3.1 Research Design

The participants for the research were taken from universities and institutions across north India. Questionnaires were sent to full-time employees working in higher education using purposive sampling as these individuals possessed the specific experiential knowledge required to meaningfully respond to the measures of organizational politics, political skill, and employee engagement. Access restrictions, lack of a centralized sampling frame, and institutional variability made probability sampling infeasible. The total sample size was 250 and further analysis of data was done on 227 samples due to missing data, incomplete questionnaires, etc. The study employed an exploratory correlational design to examine the relationships between perceived workplace politics, political skill, and employee engagement. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and caste of the participants as well as the type of institute (private or public) they are employed in were asked for descriptive purpose.

3.2 Tools

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale: To measure employees' level of engagement in their work, the nine-item *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli et al.

(2006) was used. Adapted from the original 15-item scale, the UWES-9 includes three dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. All items are rated on a 7-point frequency scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The scale has been found to be an adequate measure in the Indian context (Kataria et al., 2013). Internal consistency reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .84 for vigour, .89 for dedication, and .79 for absorption. During analysis, the item "I get carried away when I'm working" was removed due to its low factor loading (.385) and communality (.148), indicating conceptual divergence from the core dimensions. Its removal enhanced the scale's internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .911$) and supported a clearer single-factor structure, thereby improving both reliability and conceptual clarity.

Political Skill Inventory: The PSI developed by Ferris et al. (2005) is originally an 18-item survey that measures the political skill of the respondents. The shortened version of the inventory created by Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2009) is used which consists of 8 items. The PSI consists of four dimensions: networking ability, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the items on a scale of 1 to 7. The scale scored a reliability of 0.74 (Vigoda-Gadot & Meisler, 2009).

Perception of Organizational Politics Scale: To measure employees' perceptions of organizational politics, the revised 15-item *Perceptions of Politics Scale* (POPS) developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997) was used, based on the original scale by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). This version assesses three key dimensions: general political behaviour, "go along to get ahead," and pay and promotion policies. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and the scale demonstrated strong composite reliability ($\alpha = .87$; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997b). During the initial analysis, two items—"Since I have worked in this department, I have never seen the pay increase process" and "I can't remember when a person received a pay increase or promotion"—were removed due to very low communalities (.197 and .107) and weak factor loadings. These items showed poor alignment with the underlying construct, and their removal resulted in a clearer three-factor structure.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Jamovi (Version 2.7.6). Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses assessed variable distributions and scale consistency. Pearson correlations examined bivariate relationships among Perception of Organizational Politics, Political Skill, and Employee Engagement. Mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes) in Jamovi to test the indirect effect of Political Skill on the relationship between Perception of Organizational Politics (X) and Employee Engagement (Y). Significance of the

indirect effect was evaluated with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. All tests used a .05 significance level.

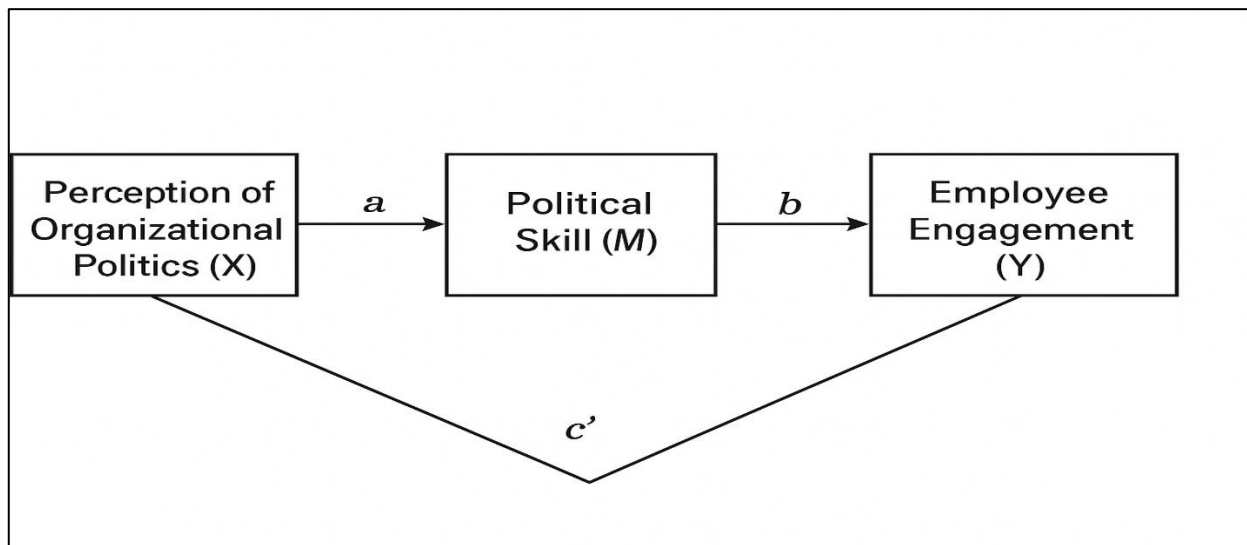


Figure 1. PROCESS Macro Model 4 Diagram

4. Results

The analytical sample size for this study consisted of $N = 227$ participants, with high data integrity confirmed by zero missing values recorded across all variables, including demographic covariates such as age, gender, type of institute, and caste, as well as the primary psychological constructs (POP, PSI, and the dependent variable, UWES/EE). Descriptive statistics indicated the mean age was 38.8 years ($SD = 8.79$), spanning a 41-year range (Minimum = 24, Maximum = 65), indicating that the sample consisted primarily of middle-aged employees. The mean score for sex was 1.66 ($SD = 0.48$), which suggests a slightly higher proportion of female participants in the sample; whereas the mean value for the type of institution was 2.80 ($SD = 0.53$), showing that the majority of respondents were employed in private institutions. The mean caste score of 1.16 ($SD = 0.46$) indicates greater representation of individuals belonging to the General category. For the core psychological variables, the independent variable POP had a mean score of 37.9 ($SD = 4.80$), the mediator PSI had a mean of 38.6 ($SD = 5.65$), and the dependent variable UWES/EE exhibited the highest mean (38.9) and standard deviation ($SD = 7.63$). The median scores for these variables were 38, 39, and 40 respectively, indicating that the distributions were symmetrical and centered around the mean. Skewness values for POP (-0.78), PSI (-0.58), and EE (-1.18) were all negative, showing a slight tendency for participants to report higher levels on these scales. Kurtosis values for POP

(1.07), PSI (-0.15), and EE (1.84) suggest that the distributions were neither sharply peaked nor too flat.

The correlation matrix revealed statistically significant and positive relationship among all three primary variables. The correlation between Perception of Organizational Politics and Political Skill was $r = 0.399$ ($p < .001$), while the correlation between POP and Employee Engagement was stronger, at $r = 0.637$ ($p < .001$). Path analysis was conducted to test a mediation model in which Political Skill was hypothesized to mediate the relationship between Perception of Organizational Politics and Employee Engagement. The results showed that all path coefficients were statistically significant. The effect of POP on PSI (path a) was 0.475 ($p < .001$), which is moderate, indicating that employees who perceived higher levels of organizational politics also reported greater political skill. The effect of PSI on Employee Engagement (path b) was 0.328 ($p < .001$), showing that higher political skill contributed to higher engagement levels. The direct path from POP to EE (path c) was 0.857 ($p < .001$), representing a strong effect and confirming a strong direct relationship between the two. The total effect ($c + a \times b$) was 1.013 ($p < .001$), suggesting that for every one-unit increase in perception of politics, employee engagement increased by approximately one unit. The indirect effect ($a \times b$) was 0.156 ($p < .001$), accounting for 15.4% of the total effect, while the direct effect represented the remaining 84.6%.

Table 1. Mediation Analysis of Political Skill on the Relationship Between Perception of Organizational Politics and Employee Engagement ($N = 227$)

Path	Relationship	Estimate (β)	SE	p-value	Interpretation
A	POP → Political Skill	0.461	0.0767	< .001	Higher perception of politics predicts greater political skill
B	Political Skill → Employee Engagement	0.345	0.0725	< .001	Political skill enhances employee engagement
c' (Direct Effect)	POP → Employee Engagement	0.857	0.0949	< .001	POP has a strong direct positive effect on engagement

a × b (Indirect Effect)	POP → PSI → EE	0.156	0.0426	< .001	Partial mediation through political skill
Total Effect (c = c' + a×b)	POP → Employee Engagement	1.013	0.0916	< .001	Combined direct and indirect influence of POP on EE

Note. POP = Perception of Organizational Politics; PSI = Political Skill Inventory; EE = Employee Engagement. All path coefficients are significant at $p < .001$. The indirect effect accounts for approximately 15.4% of the total effect, indicating partial mediation.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables and Covariates

Variable	N	Mean	Median	S.D.	Min	Max
POP	227	37.9	38	4.80	22	45
PSI	227	38.6	39	5.65	21	49
UWES	227	38.9	40	7.63	3	48
Age	227	38.8	38	8.79	24	65
Sex	227	1.66	2	0.48	1	2
Type of Institute (TOI)	227	2.80	3	0.53	1	3
Caste	227	1.16	1	0.46	1	3

Note. POP = Perception of Organizational Politics; PSI = Political Skill Inventory; UWES = Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Sex coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female. TOI coded as 1 = Central, 2 = State, 3 = Private. Caste coded as 1 = General, 2 = OBC, 3 = SC/ST.

5. Discussion

The present study set out to examine the relationship between perception of organizational politics and employee engagement in the higher education sector in India. Furthermore, it investigated whether political skill serves as a mediating mechanism that helps explain how perceptions of politics influence engagement. Using survey data from 227 employees and conducting statistical analysis, the results make a significant contribution to the existing literature on these variables, challenging the traditional view of organizational politics as inherently destructive in nature. (Lepine et al., 2005; Bedi & Schat, 2013).

The results reveal that having a higher awareness of political dynamics is strongly associated with increased engagement. This may point to the fact that employees may perceive the political environment not as a stressor, but a challenge or opportunity that could have benefits (Parker & Griffin, 2011). Whereas the associated risks could be viewed as unavoidable realities that must be dealt with and acknowledged as part and parcel of the job. Such a positive take on organizational complexities, can intrinsically motivate high engagement behaviour, which in turn enhances employees' sense of organizational fit, fostering more positive attitudes (Vigoda, 2000; May et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2008; Chang et al., 2009; Olson et al., 2014)

A key explanatory factor for this positive response to politics is the tendency of humans to accept and adapt. This adaptive behaviour, in organizational context, can be understood as a strategic response to fit in. When employees recognizes that politics is an inevitable component of organizational life—a "do or die" reality—they may gradually learn to embrace it. This adaptation involves cultivating skills that enable employees to navigate the political landscape effectively. Among these, political skill stands out as a critical personal resource that can enhance positive outcomes (Hochwarter, 2012; Khan et al., 2021; Wang & Chen, 2022; Crawford et al., 2019). In the present study, political skill acts as a partial mediator, hence explaining part of the relationship between organizational politics and employee engagement. This indicates that employees with political skills are indeed better able to navigate the political scenario and stay psychologically invested in their work. The result aligns with existing findings showing that political skill can shape the impact of politics on employee outcomes (Ahmad-Mughal et al., 2017b; Jabid et al., 2021c). However, it's important to point out that the direct effect of politics on engagement is significant, even in the absence of political skill. Political skill acts as complementary skill that further augments this engagement. Hence, unlike earlier studies that conceptualized political skill primarily as a protective shield against the negative consequences of politics, this research positions it as a complementary asset that augments its positive effects.

The relationships in this study can also be substantiated by two theoretical lenses. First, the challenge-stressor framework helps explain the direct positive relationship between politics and engagement, positioning politics as a challenge that can energize employees rather than drain them. Second, the gain spiral of resources (Hobfoll, 2001; Salanova et al., 2010) provides a basis for understanding the mediating role of political skill—political skill is a resource that employee invests to enhance engagement and gain further resources in the process.

5.1 Practical Implication

For politics to be perceived as a challenge rather than a threat, it is important that it is well regulated and not left unchecked. Leaders and administrators in higher education can intentionally design political processes that enhance adaptive engagement rather than create frustration. This may require a shift in mindset towards the idea of politics itself. Active engagement in politics, can bring about opportunities that are beneficial for employees. When there is something to gain for everyone, rather than cynicism, a more proactive approach to political dynamics is developed.

Organizations can promote this type of attitude towards politics by rewarding and recognizing adaptive behaviours such as strategic navigation, alliance building, and initiative-taking. To strengthen these behaviours, they can be explicitly integrated into performance appraisals, promotion criteria, or professional development pathways. From a structural standpoint, organizations should regulate power and influence in a way that ensures even self-serving behaviours do not harm other employees. This can be achieved by increasing transparency, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and acknowledging politics as part of organizational culture rather than denying its existence. When political practices are structured around opportunities for employee growth aligned with organizational objectives, politics becomes more justifiable and constructive.

Another important aspect organizations can focus on is investing in the political skills of employees. Since higher political skill is associated with greater engagement, institutions should actively work to enhance competencies such as relationship building, social astuteness, networking, and influence tactics. When employees have the right tools to navigate their environment, they develop a stronger sense of belonging. These skills can be cultivated through workshops and seminars on communication and leadership development. Additionally, mentorship programs and informal learning opportunities can prepare employees to handle organizational politics more effectively.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the complex interplay between the Perception of Organizational Politics (POP) and Employee Engagement (EE), mediated by Political Skill (PSI), within the under-researched context of Indian higher education. Challenging the traditional, overwhelmingly negative view of organizational politics, the findings demonstrated a strong, statistically significant positive relationship between POP and EE. This supports the notion that employees, particularly in this sector, may appraise political dynamics as a challenge stressor—

an opportunity for mastery and growth—rather than a mere obstacle. Crucially, the research confirmed that Political Skill acts as a significant partial mediator in this relationship. This indicates that employees with higher political skill are better equipped to navigate the perceived political environment, leveraging this personal resource to maintain and further augment their psychological investment in work, consistent with the theoretical premise of a resource gain spiral. Overall, the results provide compelling evidence that, for politically astute employees, an awareness of workplace politics is not necessarily corrosive but can be a catalyst for higher engagement.

6.1 *Limitations of the Study*

Despite its contributions, this research is subject to several limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the cross-sectional design, while suited to the exploratory nature of this study, does not allow for causal conclusions. The mediation pathways identified through PROCESS Macro Model 4 reflect statistically supported associations rather than confirmed causal sequences, and the direction of these relationships over time remains to be established. Secondly, the sample was drawn exclusively from higher education institutions in North India using purposive sampling, which, while appropriate given the access constraints and the absence of a centralized sampling frame, does limit how broadly the findings can be applied. The higher proportion of participants from private institutions further narrows the scope, and replication across other sectors, regions, and cultural contexts would be needed before wider conclusions can be drawn. Thirdly, while the reframing of organizational politics as a challenge stressor is grounded in established theoretical frameworks—including the Challenge–Hindrance Stressor model (LePine et al., 2005), the transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001)—it is important to note that how politics is appraised varies from person to person. The findings therefore reflect the appraisals of this particular sample and may not hold in contexts where political dynamics are experienced more negatively. Fourthly, the indirect effect of political skill, though statistically significant and supported by bootstrapped confidence intervals, is derived from a single-method cross-sectional design. This means the mediation should be treated as preliminary evidence rather than a confirmed psychological process, and longitudinal or multi-source data would be needed to more robustly validate the pathway.

6.2 *Directions for Future Research*

These limitations pave the way for exciting avenues for future scholarly inquiry. We recommend that future studies adopt longitudinal research designs to establish temporal causality, specifically examining how changes in POP influence subsequent changes in political

skill and engagement over several measurement waves. Researchers should also test the generalizability of our positive POP-EE model by replicating this study in diverse organizational settings (e.g., technology, manufacturing) and across different national cultures to explore cultural boundary conditions. To mitigate the reliance on self-report data, future work could incorporate multi-source data collection, such as gathering political skill ratings from supervisors or peers, or using objective performance metrics as a dependent variable. Finally, exploring moderating variables could provide deeper insight; for instance, examining how organizational justice perceptions or transformational leadership might condition the transition of POP from a hindrance appraisal to a challenge appraisal.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [author initials], upon reasonable request.

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