

# A Study of Relationship of Perceived Organizational Politics and Spirituality at Workplace in IT and ITES Organizations

Puja Khatri<sup>1</sup> and Pragya Gupta<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor of Management, University School of Management Studies, GGSIP University, Delhi, India; pujakhatri12@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, USMS, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, India;  
Gupta.pragya09@gmail.com

## Abstract

The increasing popularity of workplace spirituality has been associated with a myriad of benefits it is purported to bring about in the organizations, however not many empirical evidences of its inverse relationship with organizational politics have been reported. A sample of 202 employees from IT and ITES sectors based out of Delhi NCR was studied to not only examine the relationship of workplace spirituality with perceptions of organizational politics in a negative context as is popularly viewed but also look at the concept of positive/constructive politics at play in the organization. Analysis indicates significant relationship with the negative POPS but no relationship found with respect to positive politics. The reasons for these findings, its consequences and implications as well as directions for future research have been discussed.

**Keywords:** Delhi-NCR, Organizational Politics, Positive Politics, Spirituality at Workplace, Workplace Spirituality

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## 1. Introduction

Workplace Spirituality, unquestionably, has been one of the fieriest topics of interest in the organizational sciences since early 1990s. Scholars have argued that there is a gradual increase of interest in spirituality as an academic topic perhaps as a result of the occurrence of different events<sup>32</sup>. According to Bosch<sup>4</sup>, study of workplace spirituality is viewed as an area that helps in understanding various leadership and managerial issues and related organizational processes. Past research have been successful in exhibiting both positive and inverse relationships between workplace spirituality and attitudinal/behavioural outcomes and organizational constructs like OBSE, intention to quit, satisfaction, motivation, etc.; however some critical areas in modern organizational setup has not been explored yet.

This study aims at empirically analyse the association of workplace spirituality with one of the most significant but not fully explored area in management sciences - perceptions of organizational politics. Nowadays, organizations consider organizational politics as a severe problem owing to its negative effects like job stress, turnover intention, decrease in productivity, etc. Organizational restructuring, downsizing and outsourcing are a few factors which have adversely affected the employees in the IT and ITES sectors, especially so because of the need of re-skilling

of employees owing to fast changing technologies. This has in turn steered an insecure environment leading to a charged highly political environment. The study therefore has consciously selected the IT/ITES sector to examine its model.

Interestingly, nevertheless this traditional view of workplace politics as an evil is gradually giving way to view it as having a positive side too. As a matter of fact, some researchers believe that the organizational politics may not be necessarily bad for the organization but are often helpful for the organization<sup>9,21</sup> and may even be necessary for organizational effectiveness<sup>32</sup>.

It is therefore considered worthwhile to study the relationship of workplace spirituality in mitigating the perceived harmful effects of politics and even supporting the notion of its positive side.

## 2. Conceptualizing Spirituality at Workplace

Despite surging interest in workplace spirituality, there has been little progress towards developing a more rigorous and empirically informed science of workplace spirituality. The lack of clarity, ambiguity, and the complexity of the construct make spirituality a difficult research topic to investigate<sup>17</sup>. Despite the presence

of varied definitions and dimensions of workplace spirituality, Sheep<sup>33</sup> emphasised on a conceptual convergence of viewing workplace spirituality as a multidimensional concept.

It is evident from the literature that spirituality is inherent in every human being; secondly it is not only an individual pursuit for seeking meaning and purpose in life but also a need to interconnect with other individuals in this quest. Furthermore, as opposed to institutionalized religion characterised by adherence to beliefs, rituals, or practices of a specific organized religion institution or tradition; spirituality is viewed as a private, all-encompassing, non-denominational, universal human feeling<sup>24</sup>.

As defined by Mitroff and Denton<sup>28,29</sup>, workplace spirituality is viewed as the an attempt to explore one's ultimate goal in life, to acknowledge the importance of developing strong ties with coworkers and also have an alignment with the values of the organization. Ashmos and Duchon<sup>2</sup> define workplace spirituality as the acknowledgment that workforces have an inner life that promotes and is sustained by meaningful work done in the context of community.

The current study attempts at defining workplace spirituality at the individual level complementing it with that at the organizational level to make it more holistic. The revised definition of spirit at work as given by Kinjerski and Skrypnek<sup>18</sup> involves: 1. **Engaging work** considered as feeling of well-being, an individual belief of being engaged in meaningful work and having an alignment between one's own values and beliefs with that of organizational values characterised by the work content and how it is being performed; 2. **A spiritual connection** represented by a feeling of belongingness to something greater than oneself; 3. **A sense of community** distinguished by a feeling of connection with others and common purpose and 4. **A mystical experience** categorised by a positive state of energy or vitality, a sense of perfection, transcendence, and experiences of contentment. This definition by the authors is closest to what we think should outline the individual-focused approach to spirituality at workplace. However, in our model, we have also included the concept of organizational spirituality which is defined as the extent to which an employee identifies an alignment of his own goals and values with that of the organization he is associated with. Any elucidation of workplace spirituality is incomplete without inclusion of interpretation of all-inclusive individual and organizational levels<sup>19,31</sup>.

## 2.1 Organizational Politics

Politics in organizations is a sacrosanct fact; for years the general belief has been that behaviour in and of organizations is most often political in nature. As long as there are human beings, politics will be played in the workplace. Some people are better adapted to participate in organizational politics than others,

because of their personal values, ethics and the work behaviours which they adapted from their surroundings where they grew. Organizational politics started gaining attention when the concepts of person-organization misfit and mismatch of personal and organizational goals clearly defied the theory of rational organization, especially when different parts of the organization have conflicting goals<sup>36</sup>.

In their seminal conceptual work, Ferris et al.<sup>11</sup> defined organizational politics as 'a social influence process in which behaviour is strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest, which is either consistent with or at the expense of others' interests'.

Ferris et al.<sup>11</sup> argued that the construct of politics is a three dimensional construct, namely 'general political behaviour' which is the individual's self-serving behaviour to gain desired results, 'go along to get ahead' where an individual impassively complies with the flow so as to keep gaining benefits and thirdly 'pay and promotion policies' wherein individuals actively participate in influencing the policy implementation and the decision making process through political positioning<sup>35</sup>.

Organizational politics is most often considered dysfunctional because it can potentially dislocate organizational efficiency and effectiveness<sup>15</sup>. Nonetheless, organizational politics may also have some positive outcomes. As cited in Drory and Gadot<sup>6</sup> some of the studies such as Gandz and Murray<sup>12</sup> and Bacharach<sup>3</sup> have revealed that many of the organizational members may believe in the inevitability of the political behaviour at workplaces particularly when someone is interested in advancing in the organizations (promotion) or being recognized as a good employee or a talented manager by the employers and the fellow co-workers. As a matter of fact, it is believed that some aspect of 'good' politics in the leadership behaviour, general managerial decisions and valid HR practices may actually lead to win-win consequences for the all the players i.e., the employer, the employees and the organization as a whole.

Holbeche Research Report (2002) from English consultancy Roffey Park, "The Power of Constructive Politics" strongly highlights the reality that political affiliations within the organization can be useful in getting things done, removing barriers to bring about change, bringing about buy-in on key projects and speeding up the decision making process. In this research we take a bilateral approach of evaluating the organizational politics, one including the classical conceptualization of a negative connotation of politics but also taking politics as a positive construct in the organizations' interest. This view is consistent with Ferris et al.<sup>10</sup> who brought up the positive side of political behaviour arguing that although political, such a behaviour may usher in some positive consequences for the person acting in this manner and his associates in the organization. These authors point out that the positive nature of politics in organizations is predominantly

a significant topic which must be pursued as it is not only under-researched but can potentially alter the study of politics in the workplace.

## 2.2 Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Politics

While researchers have suggested that the presence of organizational politics is inherent in all organizations<sup>12,39</sup>, they also confer that it is a self-centric activity aimed at securing advantage for either the individual or the group level. When individuals in the organization are self-centered, they only consider their own needs and ignore others which may result in excessive conflicts and hinders the creation of a sense of community in the organization.

On the other hand, scholars like<sup>22</sup> contended that there are common grounds of support, connections, reciprocity and community between the concept of workplace spirituality and organizational politics. Nevertheless, she asserted that organizational politics differentiates those who will receive special favours and advancement, whereas workplace spirituality refrains from such bias. She firmly believed that when organizational politics is at play, some workers benefit and others suffer and those who are at a disadvantaged position often get stressed out or eventually leave. Alternatively, workplace spirituality is focused at fair practices at work and acceptance of all stakeholders in its fold so as to invoke a team spirit that will be comprehensive, involving the entire unit or organization concerned. In similar vein, Kolodinsky et al.<sup>20</sup> believed that the leaders have a crucial role in promulgating the benefits of spirituality across the organization, thereby dissipating the negative effects of politics which impede the free expression. The negativities of organizational politics can surely obstruct the positivity that can be brought about by accommodating spirituality at workplace and a spiritually effective organization requires a balancing factor like “inspiring and enabling organizational leadership”<sup>18</sup>. In her doctoral thesis, M. James<sup>14</sup> proposed that spirituality contributes in making employees feel generally secure, even if the organizational environment is not secure. The individual sense of spirituality at work is the reason why the reactions of individuals differ towards the negativities in the work environment. Supporting this viewpoint, Tan<sup>34</sup> argues that excessive politics in the organization is mitigated by development in spirituality at workplace.

The positive aspects of the politics as conceptualised by Fedor and Maslyn and Maslyn et al.<sup>25</sup> however has not been considered in the interpretation of the various aspects of the actual political behaviour at workplace. The authors argued that if politics is being used to get things done smoothly or to increase the visibility of particular ideas bypassing the chain of command then it can

be viewed as positive politics. It is however important to note that both the aspects of politics - negative and positive is said to occur simultaneously<sup>10</sup> and positive politics is not merely the absence of negative politics<sup>25</sup>.

It would be therefore interesting to see whether perceptions of organization politics and its negative effects on the organizational functioning can be alleviated by fostering spirituality at work. Furthering this logic, it can be implied that the positive traits of organizational politics must also surge the beneficial outcomes brought by the workplace spirituality.

## 3. Research Objectives

- To study the relationship of workplace spirituality with perceptions of organizational politics (negative politics).
- To study the relationship of workplace spirituality with positive organizational politics.

### 3.1 Hypotheses

To test the above research questions based on evidences from literature review, the study suggests the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Spirituality at Workplace and Perceptions of Organizational Politics (POPS).

H<sub>1a</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Engaging Work (EW) and POPS.

H<sub>1b</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Mystical Experience (ME) and POPS.

H<sub>1c</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Sense of Community (SoC) and POPS.

H<sub>1d</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Spiritual Connection (SpC) and POPS.

H<sub>1e</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between alignment with organizational values and POPS.

H<sub>2</sub>: There exists a significant and positive relationship between Spirituality at Workplace and positive politics.

H<sub>2a</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Engaging Work (EW) and positive politics.

H<sub>2b</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Mystic AI Experience (ME) and positive politics.

H<sub>2c</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Sense of Community (SoC) and positive politics.

H<sub>2d</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Spiritual connection (SpC) and positive politics.

H<sub>2e</sub>: There exists a significant and negative relationship between Alignment with organizational values and positive politics.

## 4. Research Methodology

A comprehensive questionnaire was developed for data collection on the topic of study. It consisted of questions based on following measures:

- The individual spirituality was measured by using Individual Spirituality at Work (I-SAW) by Kinjerski and Skrypnek<sup>18</sup> scale measuring the four components of spirituality at work - Engaging Work (EW), Mystical Experience (ME), Spiritual Connection (SpC) and Sense of Community (SoC).
- The organizational spirituality was measured by using Alignment of organizational values scale (adapted from<sup>2,26</sup>) which depicts the match between workers' spiritual values and the spiritual values exuded by the organization.
- Perceptions of organizational politics has been measured using a scale consisting of 30 items:
  - (i) The negative politics was measured with the help of POPS scale developed by Kacmar and Carlson<sup>16</sup>.
  - (ii) The positive politics was measured using a self-constructed questionnaire comprising of 15 items.

The questions were rated on Likert scale of five points ranging from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest level of response (strongly agree) and 1 being the lowest (strongly disagree). The self-constructed questionnaire was subjected to review by experts and their inputs have been incorporated accordingly.

Reliability of the questionnaire is as given below.

According to Nunnally<sup>30</sup>, reliability of about 0.70 and more is essential for the instruments used in basic research.

The sampling of the study was proportionate stratified random sampling wherein two organizations each from IT and ITES sectors were shortlisted. The list of level-wise employees was taken from the HR department based on select parameters and a final list of names of 60 respondents from each organization was prepared from the initial list based on random sample number generator; in total 240 respondents were contacted. Out of 60 employees who were shortlisted for the survey administration from each organization, 6 were from higher management, 18 from Middle management and 36 from the junior level to keep the proportionate representation of the hierarchical levels in the IT/ITES sectors.

**Table 1.** Reliability of the instruments used in the study

Name of the scale	Author	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Individual Spirituality at Work (I-SAW)	Kinjerski and Skrypnek <sup>18</sup>	18	0.93
The organizational spirituality scale	Self-Constructed	10	0.92
POPS	Kacmar and Carlson <sup>16</sup>	15	0.84
Positive Politics	Self-Constructed	15	0.82

A web-based survey was prepared on Google docs and an online link was shared with all the chosen set of employees for the purpose of data collection.

After a month of launching the web-survey, we received 208 responses out of 240 solicited, signifying a response rate of 86.6%. Cases where more than 50% of the data was missing were removed. Ultimately, 202 cases were finally used for statistical analysis.

## 5. Study Findings

The first section of the questionnaire collected the demographic information of the respondents including gender, age, educational qualifications, total work experience, employment history, etc. followed by items relating to perceptions of organizational politics and spirituality at workplace.

Prior to administering the questionnaire, a short description of the concept of workplace spirituality was provided to the respondents for their understanding.

## 6. Findings and Discussions

To achieve the objectives of this study, Pearson correlation coefficients have been applied on the dimensions of spirituality at work and perceptions of organizational politics - negative politics (Table 2.) and positive politics (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Correlations between Spirituality at work and Negative Politics

Dimensions of SAW	Perceptions of Negative Politics
Engaging work	-.306**
Mystical Experience	-.262**
Sense of community	-.363**
Spiritual connection	-.211**
Alignment of personal values with organizational values	-.633**
Spirituality at Work (overall)	-.512**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 3.** Correlations between Spirituality at work and Positive Politics

Dimensions of SAW	Positive Politics
Engaging work	.004
Mystical Experience	.073
Sense of community	.000
Spiritual connection	.041
Alignment of personal values with organizational values	-.054
Spirituality at Work (overall)	.035

The correlation coefficient (Table 2.) indicates that workplace spirituality and its dimensions have negative and significant relationship with POPS. The dimension of alignment with organizational values displayed highly significant relationship with POPS ( $r = -0.633, p \leq 0.01$ ). Moderately high and negative relationship of POPS was found with the other dimensions of SAW, viz., engaging work ( $r = -0.306, p \leq 0.01$ ), mystical experience ( $r = -0.262, p \leq 0.01$ ), sense of community ( $r = -0.363, p \leq 0.01$ ), spiritual connection ( $r = -0.211, p \leq 0.01$ ). Further, the table 3 also exhibited a significant and negative relationship with the total SAW score ( $r = -0.512, p \leq 0.01$ ). Kinjerski and Skrypnik<sup>18</sup> defines Engaging Work (EW) as characterized by profound feelings of well-being, a belief that one is engaged in work that is meaningful and with a higher purpose and an alignment between one's values and beliefs and organizational values, sense of community is portrayed by a deep feeling of association with others and a common purpose and the fourth dimension of SAW, a mystical or unitive experience, is illustrated by positive energy or vitality which brings about complete joy and a feeling of absolute bliss. By virtue of its definition, workplace spirituality has a positive connotation and it is seen that an individual's sense of spirituality has profound reactions to the negativity in the work environment. On the other hand individual perceptions of politics have a widespread notion of negativity attached to it which is related to high levels of stress, negligent behaviours, workplace aggression, low productivity, etc.<sup>38</sup> (Cropanzano et al., 1997).

Kolodinsky et al.,<sup>20</sup> described the spiritually-rich workplace as one that values and promotes openness and diversity in the workplace, especially in the context of reducing the negative effects associated with organizational politics. The authors further argued that leaders who are spiritually-inclined are in a better position to lead spiritually-rich workplaces and diminish the perceptions of politics at workplace. Such leaders also empower the employees for discovering their self-worth and increased sense of personal security by encouraging them to explore their own spirituality, thereby minimizing the uncertainty,

**Table 4.** Correlations between POPS and Positive Politics

		Positive Politics
POPS	Pearson Correlation	.320**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	202

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

ambiguity, insecurity associated with political work environment. This means that the employees generally feel more secure even when the organizational environment is perceived as political and thereby insecure<sup>1</sup>. This leads us to accept the hypotheses H1 and its sub-hypotheses.

Table 3 establishes the findings of relationship between SAW and positive politics. Interestingly, no significant relationship was found with respect to positive politics.

The past research has shown that what is considered to be political behaviour in an organization may not be considered the same in a different organization<sup>27</sup>, suggesting thereby that individuals must take into account the organizational context while evaluating the political nature of the organization environment. Furthermore, the employees attribute the political behaviour to be positive or negative depending on whether it provides benefits to themselves or others<sup>5</sup>. It is important to look at how perceptions of both the positive and negative politics work together to foresee the reactions of the employee which could be both good and bad respectively. It is also imperative to make a note that although there exists extensive research on the negative political perceptions and its undesirable impact on organizational constructs like citizenship behaviour, commitment, job satisfaction, etc., no substantial studies have been conducted on the relatively positive side of politics<sup>8</sup>.

Another justification of absence of any relationship between spirituality at work and organizational politics (positive) may be that traditionally the existence of politics is viewed in a negative light only. As described by Vigoda<sup>38</sup>, organizational politics is a complex blend of power, influence and self-serving behaviours that govern the people's behaviours at workplace. Indeed then, people's perceptions of organizational politics is that of indulging in rat race to strive for promotions at work, higher salaries, job security, etc. inherently self-serving and destructive. So, at best the respondents view the positive politics as mere the absence of negative politics without much substantial beneficial outcomes associated. Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> and its sub-hypotheses stands rejected.

The data was further analysed to see the correlations between positive and negative politics. Table 4 shows a positive and significant relationship between the perceptions of organizational politics and positive politics ( $r = 0.320, p \leq 0.01$ ).

Political behaviour and political skills in organizations are at best viewed as the influence tactics and self-serving behaviour of individuals to maximise their interests and goals in the workplace<sup>37</sup>. Such self-interested behaviour at workplace is generally conceived as negative form of organizational politics, although all such behaviours that are deemed political may not necessarily be bad for the organizations or individuals involved. Fedor and Maslyn argued that the political behaviour can be considered positive when it is the only means available to the members of an organization to get things done in the organization at a particular time. So, positive and negative political behaviour may be similar forms of behaviour, often self-serving and unendorsed by the organization, yet the major difference between the two only lies in the mind of the benefactor of such behaviour.

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of the current research was quite unique and divergent in its approach; on one hand it intended to explore the relationship of workplace spirituality with POPS (negative politics) and on the other hand it went on to investigate whether the concept of positive politics has any affirmative impact on the organization by enhancing the beneficial outcomes of the workplace spirituality. The study attempted at finding out the presence of positive political behaviour and integrates it with the traditional views of politics in the workplace. The results however showed significant and negative relationship of workplace spirituality with POPS but no relationship with positive politics. Fedor et al.<sup>8</sup> posited that mere perceptions of presence of high levels of political activity in an organization may generally symbolise the existence of negative environment. Ferris et al.<sup>9</sup> further concedes that the presence of political behaviour in the organization distresses individuals not because of its outcomes, but because of its easy predictableness or whether it could be controlled by them, wherein even the positive outcomes may result in negative relationship with individual attitudes and behaviours.

Marques<sup>23</sup> compares workplace spirituality and organizational politics as having common base of support, connections, reciprocity and feeling of community with a major contradiction being that workplace spirituality refrains from any special favours or advancement or discriminatory practices which gets normally associated with organizational politics.

Furthermore, an interesting question is whether there exists any such concept like positive politics or is it just the self-serving behaviour of individuals with narrow goals for self and team and as such no specific benefits for the organization or the parties involved. There have been a very few scientific enquiries on the positive side of politics; most of the work has been based on gut instinct and study reports on the basis of self-report. Empirical

findings of the current study do not lend support to a naïve constructive self-interest approach broadly talking about reciprocity, social networks and welfare of others along with self.

However, it cannot be denied that politics is a construct which is an omnipresent reality in the organizations<sup>27</sup> and ways must be found out to negate its perceived harmful effects on the organization and individuals. One way is through the practice of spirituality at work especially at the leadership level as it would eventually get self-percolated within the organization. A person who is high on spirituality has universal love, self-control, flexible attitude, compassion, empathy, sensitivity and an understanding of people around them. Presence of such virtues in an individual would definitely help in reducing the negativity associated with the perceptions of organizational politics and related work outcomes. Furthering the above logic, Kolodinsky et al.<sup>20</sup> has differentiated between the constructs of political skills and perceived organizational politics. They postulated that whereas organizational politics is viewed as self-serving behaviour with detrimental effects; political skill is a critical ability of leaders to navigate turbulent work environments and effectively influence others and a key characteristic which promotes spirituality and counterbalances the dysfunctional effects of organizational politics.

Any study is incomplete without having discussed its strengths and limitations. The study used only full-time employees who were responding in relation to their job experiences. The respondents had relevant organizational experiences which were depicted through their responses, lending support to the generalizability of our findings. However, the sample was from Delhi-NCR which is a cosmopolitan city with a modern outlook of the professionals staying in a multi-cultural and diverse setup. Similar research should be conducted in tier2/ tier 3 cities to evaluate the individual perceptions in a different milieu. Furthermore, this study was focused on the IT and ITES sector employees, it would be worthwhile to see whether similar findings are observed in other sectors, especially public sector whose employees may be differently disposed.

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