

Theoretical Assessment of Organisational Politics in Multinational Corporations: A Systematic Literature Review

Sylvester Abomeh Ofobruku^{1*}, Idemudia Osunbor¹, & Godspower Oyor¹

¹*Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Benson Idahosa University, Edo State Nigeria*

*corresponding author: sobobruku@biu.edu.ng; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4707-8465>

Abstract

This research examines existing knowledge and scholarly thought on organisational politics and its influence on Multinational Corporations (MNCs). Past investigations into organisational politics have received only modest attention from organisational and management scholars. The study investigate the theoretical foundations, relevance, and applicability of organisational politics within multinational corporations, the relevance and applicability in understanding organisational politics, the fundamental constructs associated with organisational politics and the interventions that can positively influence the outcomes of organisational politics in multinational corporations. A qualitative research approach was used to analyse trends in organisational politics and theoretical perspectives on multinational corporations. The findings from the literature reviewed revealed that organisations should recognized the significance of leadership practices, communication strategies, and organisations cultural awareness, highlights actionable steps that organizations can take to foster a healthier political environment not only our understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of organizational politics in multinational corporations but also provides a foundation for future research and managerial practices. Managers should be encouraged to adopt supportive and collaborative approaches to leadership that focus on enhancing employee morale and motivation.

Keywords: Agency Theory, Communication Strategies, Cultural Awareness Leadership Practices, Social Exchange Theory

Introduction

Organisational politics has emerged as a critical aspect of the contemporary corporate landscape, influencing the dynamics of decision-making, power distribution, and overall organizational behavior. In the context of multinational corporations (MNCs), the impact of organisational politics becomes even more complex due to the diverse socio-cultural, and political environments in which these entities operate.

Organisational politics refers to the activities, behaviors, and strategies employed by individuals within an organisation to gain power, influence decisions, and achieve personal or group objectives. Scholars have recognized organisational politics as a multifaceted phenomenon that can manifest in various forms, such as coalition-building, manipulation, and information distortion (Ferris et al., 2019; Mintzberg, 2023). In multinational corporations, the complexity of organisational politics is heightened by the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of employees who come from different countries and cultures. Since politics involves not only the authoritative allocation of values, but the resolution of conflicts, the emergence of organizational politics in a fairly complex form in multi-national corporations is inevitable (Scherer, & Voegtlin, 2023). This makes the study of this phenomenon really imperative.

Multinational corporations, by their nature, operate across borders and are characterized by a global presence. The unique challenges faced by MNCs, include cross-cultural communication, diverse workforce management, and coordination across geographically dispersed territories thereby creating a distinct context for the study of organisational politics (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2019; Hitt et al., 2018). Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of organisational politics in MNCs is crucial for developing effective management strategies and fostering a healthy organisational culture.

While there is a considerable body of literature on organisational politics and MNCs individually, a comprehensive examination of the theoretical foundations of organisational politics in the context of multinational corporations is scanty. This study seeks to bridge this gap by synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying patterns, and proposing avenues for future research in this interdisciplinary field.

By undertaking a systematic literature review, this study aims to enhance our theoretical understanding of organisational politics in multinational corporations. The findings will provide valuable insights for academics, practitioners, and policymakers alike, thus facilitating the development of strategies to navigate the intricate landscape of organisational politics within the global business environment.

Statement of the Problem

The intricate interplay between organisational politics and the unique challenges posed by the multinational context remains a relatively under-explored area in the existing body of literature. While prior research has examined organisational politics in isolation and has delved into the complexities of multinational corporations (MNCs) separately (Sun et al, 2024), a critical gap persists in comprehensively understanding the theoretical foundations of organisational politics within the specific framework of multinational corporations (Mensah, et al, 2025).

The existing literature lacks a holistic examination of how prominent organisational politics theories, such as structural contingency theory, resource dependence theory, and social exchange theory, apply to the unique challenges faced by multinational corporations. There is a need to synthesize these theories within the MNC context to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of organisational politics in a global business environment.

Cultural and geographical diversities affect behaviours in multinational corporations, influencing communication, decision-making, and power dynamics within the organization. However, there is limited research on how cultural and geographical diversities shape the manifestations of organisational politics in MNCs. Investigating the interplay between these factors and political behaviors will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by MNCs in managing organisational politics.

While prior studies acknowledge the existence of organisational politics in MNCs, there is a dearth of research that explores the strategic implications of political behaviors on the overall performance and effectiveness of multinational corporations. Understanding how organisational politics influences strategic decision-making and corporate outcomes is essential for developing management strategies that can navigate and mitigate the negative effects of political dynamics within MNCs.

Multinational corporations need effective management strategies to address the complexities of organisational politics and foster a healthy corporate culture. However, there is a lack of research providing actionable insights and best practices for managing organisational politics in the context of MNCs.

Research Questions

- i. What are the theoretical foundations of organisational politics within the context of Multinational Corporations (MNCs)?
- ii. What is the relevance and applicability in understanding organisational politics within a multinational context?
- iii. What are the fundamental constructs associated with organisational politics in MNCs?
- iv. What are the interventions that can positively influence the outcomes of organisational politics in MNCs?

Conceptual review

Organizational Politics

Organizational politics is an inherent and pervasive aspect of corporate life (Mintzberg, 2015). In the context of multinational corporations (MNCs), the nature of organizational politics takes on a unique dimension due to the

convergence of diverse cultures, values, and perspectives within a single corporate entity. Eisenhardt (2019) suggests that understanding the intricacies of organizational politics in MNCs requires an exploration of how cultural diversity influences the dynamics of power and decision-making.

Organizational politics can be defined as the informal and often subtle activities and behaviors that individuals engage in to gain advantages, recognition, or power within an organization (Ferris et al., 2019). It involves activities such as networking, building alliances, manipulation, and strategic information dissemination. The convergence of individuals from various cultural backgrounds within MNCs not only creates a rich tapestry of perspectives but also introduces complexities in communication, decision-making, and power structures. The interplay of cultural nuances, differing communication styles, and contrasting approaches to conflict resolution all contribute to the intricate landscape of organizational politics within multinational settings.

Moreover, the decentralized nature of MNCs, with operations spanning across different countries and regions, adds another layer of complexity to organizational politics. The distribution of power and decision-making across various subsidiaries and regional offices often leads to power struggles and competition for resources, giving rise to diverse political behaviors.

Research in this domain emphasizes the need to go beyond a simplistic view of organizational politics as negative or disruptive. Instead, scholars argue for a nuanced understanding that recognizes the positive aspects of political maneuvering within MNCs. For instance, Mintzberg's (2015) work highlights how organizational politics can serve as a mechanism for individuals to express creativity, challenge existing norms, and drive innovation.

In essence, the nature of organizational politics in multinational corporations is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by cultural diversity, decentralization, and the interplay of power dynamics. Acknowledging the complexities inherent in this environment is crucial for both researchers and practitioners seeking to navigate and leverage organizational politics effectively within the global context.

The dynamics of organizational politics are shaped by the interplay of individual ambitions, power struggles, and the pursuit of organizational objectives. As employees navigate this complex landscape, understanding and managing organizational politics becomes crucial for both individual success and the overall health of the organization. The nature of organizational politics is multifaceted, comprising both positive and negative aspects. On one hand, politics can facilitate innovation, collaboration, and healthy competition.

On the other hand, it may lead to conflict, unethical behaviour, and a toxic work environment if not managed appropriately. Several factors contribute to the prevalence and intensity of organizational politics. These include individual characteristics, organizational culture, leadership styles, and the structure of the organization. Individuals with high Machiavellian tendencies, for example, are more likely to engage in political behaviors (Salancik & Pfeffer, 2018). Additionally, organizations with competitive cultures and ambiguous decision-making processes may foster a political climate, encouraging employees to navigate power dynamics to secure their positions.

The sway of organizational politics can be significant, affecting both individuals and the overall functioning of the organization. For individuals, engaging in political activities may lead to career advancement, increased job satisfaction, and access to valuable resources. However, it can also result in stress, burnout, and strained relationships with colleagues. At the organizational level, unchecked politics can hinder communication, impede decision-making, and create a culture of distrust, ultimately compromising the organization's effectiveness and success.

Effective management of organizational politics requires a proactive approach from both individuals and organizational leaders. Strategies for managing politics include promoting transparency in decision-making processes, fostering a positive organizational culture, and providing clear guidelines on acceptable behaviors.

Additionally, leaders can implement conflict resolution mechanisms, offer training on ethical decision-making, and encourage open communication to address and mitigate political behaviors (Soomro, & Hafeez, 2020).

Organizational politics is an inherent aspect of the corporate environment that individuals must navigate to achieve personal success and contribute to the overall success of the organization. While organizational politics can have both positive and negative consequences, proactive management strategies can help create a healthy and productive work environment. By understanding the nature of organizational politics and implementing effective management practices, individuals and organizations can strike a balance that promotes individual success while safeguarding the collective well-being of the workplace.

Multinational Corporations

Multinational corporations (MNCs) play a pivotal role in the contemporary global economy, serving as key actors in international business. These entities operate across borders, managing diverse subsidiaries and engaging in complex business activities. The rise of MNCs has been driven by globalization, technological advancements, and liberalized trade policies, presenting both opportunities and challenges.

Multinational corporations, often interchangeably referred to as transnational corporations, are large enterprises that operate in multiple countries, each with its own set of subsidiaries and affiliates (Buckley & Casson, 2016). Although, transnational corporations is a variant of MNCs with decentralised semi-autonomous divisions as against the centralised MNCs (Sorge, et al, 2023). The defining feature of MNCs is their ability to coordinate and integrate various business functions on a global scale, allowing them to exploit international markets, resources, and labour.

MNCs exhibit several key characteristics that distinguish them from domestic enterprises. These include the global scope of their operations, the establishment of subsidiaries in different countries, the use of advanced technologies for communication and coordination, and the ability to leverage economies of scale and scope (Caves, 2016). MNCs often engage in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), establishing a physical presence in host countries through subsidiaries, joint ventures, or wholly-owned entities.

The impact of MNCs on both host and home countries is multifaceted. Economically, they contribute to job creation, technology transfer, and the development of local industries through FDI (Dunning, 2023). However, concerns exist about the potential exploitation of cheap labor and resources in developing countries. Socially, MNCs may influence cultural norms and contribute to social change, while environmentally, they face scrutiny for their ecological footprint and resource consumption (Wartick & Cochran, 2015).

With their expansive reach and influence, MNCs bear a responsibility to address social, environmental, and ethical concerns. Scholars argue for the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), emphasizing that MNCs should go beyond profit maximization to consider the well-being of all stakeholders, including local communities and the environment (Carroll, 2011). This includes ethical business practices, environmental sustainability, and initiatives that contribute positively to the communities in which they operate.

Moreover, MNCs are increasingly expected to adhere to international norms and standards, such as the United Nations Global Compact, which outlines principles for human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption (UN Global Compact, n.d.). The global community calls for MNCs to uphold ethical standards, respect human rights, and contribute to sustainable development in every region where they have a presence.

Multinational corporations are dynamic entities that shape and are shaped by the global economy. Their operations, characterized by complexity and diversity, have profound impacts on economies, societies, and the environment. As one of the essential contributors in the international business arena, MNCs must embrace their global responsibilities, acknowledging the need for ethical business practices, sustainability, and a commitment to the well-being of all stakeholders. Balancing profit motives with social and environmental concerns will be

crucial for the long-term success and positive societal impact of multinational corporations in the globalized world.

Empirical Review

Adebayo and Adeola (2022) conducted a study titled “The Impact of Supervisor Political Behavior on Employee Engagement in Nigerian Organizations.” The objective was to examine how political behavior exhibited by supervisors influences employee engagement, with a focus on employee perceptions of fairness and trust in leadership. Using a survey-based methodology, data were collected from 180 employees working in various Nigerian companies. The findings indicated that supervisors who engaged in favoritism, information hoarding, and bias in performance appraisals significantly reduced employee engagement. Employees who perceived political behavior in their supervisors reported lower job satisfaction, reduced motivation, and a weakened sense of commitment to their organizations. However, a notable limitation of this study was its failure to explore how organizational culture might moderate the relationship between supervisor political behavior and employee engagement. While the study provided insight into the negative effects of political behavior, it did not investigate whether ethical organizational cultures could counteract these effects. This gap presents an opportunity for future research to explore the role of organizational culture in mitigating the impact of supervisor political behavior.

Mensah et al. (2021) conducted a study titled “Clique Behavior and Workplace Cohesion: Evidence from Ghanaian Multinationals.” The primary objective was to investigate how workplace cliques influence employee engagement and whether they serve as barriers or enablers of productivity. A quantitative methodology was used, with data collected through structured surveys from 210 employees across various multinational organizations in Ghana. The findings revealed that workplace cliques negatively affect employee engagement by fostering exclusionary practices, reducing teamwork, and promoting unfair access to career opportunities. Employees who were excluded from workplace cliques exhibited higher stress levels, lower commitment, and reduced willingness to contribute to team success. The study also highlighted that clique behavior creates an “in-group versus out-group” dynamic that damages organizational culture. Despite these findings, the study did not explore how leadership interventions could counteract the negative effects of workplace cliques. Future research could investigate how leadership development programs and inclusive policies might reduce clique behavior and enhance workplace collaboration.

Okafor (2020) conducted a study titled “The Role of Organizational Policies in Shaping Employee Engagement: A Case Study of South African Multinationals.” The research aimed to explore how the clarity, fairness, and consistency of organizational policies influence employee engagement. A qualitative research methodology was adopted, with in-depth interviews conducted among 100 employees from various multinational firms in South Africa. The findings indicated that ambiguous and inconsistently applied policies created uncertainty and frustration among employees, leading to disengagement. Employees who felt that policies were selectively enforced or constantly changed without consultation exhibited lower levels of trust in management. The study also found that clear and well-communicated policies contributed to higher engagement by providing employees with a sense of stability and fairness. However, the study was limited by its narrow focus on employee perceptions without considering managerial perspectives. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach that incorporates insights from both employees and management to understand how policies are perceived and implemented at different organizational levels.

Abdul and Bello (2020) examined “Supervisor Political Behavior and Organizational Trust in Nigerian Public Sector Institutions.” The study aimed to explore how political behavior among supervisors affects trust and engagement within the Nigerian public sector. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing both surveys and interviews to collect data from 250 public sector employees. The findings revealed that political behaviors such as favoritism, biased decision-making, and manipulation of organizational policies led to mistrust and disengagement. Employees who worked under politically motivated supervisors were less likely to feel valued and often sought alternative job opportunities. The study also highlighted that trust in leadership was a key determinant of employee engagement, with transparent and fair supervisors fostering higher commitment levels. However, a key gap in the research was its limited focus on the private sector. Future studies should explore

whether similar dynamics exist in private organizations, particularly in industries where competition for promotions and resources is high.

Eze and Nwankwo (2019) conducted a study titled “Clique Behavior and Workplace Exclusion: A Case Study of Nigerian Universities.” The objective was to examine how clique behavior affects job satisfaction and workplace inclusion among university staff. Using a survey-based methodology, data were collected from 200 academic and non-academic staff members from multiple universities in Nigeria. The findings revealed that clique behavior significantly reduces job satisfaction and collaboration among employees. Staff members who felt excluded from influential groups within their institutions reported feelings of isolation, frustration, and reduced morale. The study also found that cliques played a significant role in shaping access to research grants, promotions, and administrative positions. However, the research did not examine the long-term effects of clique behavior on organizational culture and employee retention. Future research could investigate how sustained clique behavior impacts institutional reputation, faculty turnover, and knowledge-sharing within universities.

Agyemang (2018) explored “The Role of Organizational Policies in Enhancing Fairness and Reducing Workplace Conflict: Evidence from Ghana.” The study examined whether transparent and well-enforced organizational policies contribute to employee engagement and conflict resolution in multinational organizations. A survey-based methodology was used, gathering data from 230 employees across various industries in Ghana. The findings showed that organizations with clear policies on promotions, salary adjustments, and workplace conduct had lower incidences of workplace conflict and higher levels of employee engagement. Employees in organizations where policies were inconsistently enforced or subject to manipulation reported feeling undervalued and disengaged. However, the study did not explore how organizational policies might interact with external factors such as economic conditions or industry regulations. Future research could examine whether external business environments influence how organizational policies are designed and perceived.

Theoretical Review

This section reviews some selected management theories that best explain the construct under investigation and relate the theories analytically to the assertions of the research questions. This will enable scholars to understand the management theories that have shaped and still sharpening the intervening factors in organisational politics discoursed in multinational organisations.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social exchange theory (SET), rooted in the work of Blau (1964) and Emerson (1976), provides a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal relationships within organisations. At its core, SET posits that individuals engage in social interactions based on the expectation of reciprocity and the pursuit of self-interest (Blau, 1964). In the context of organisational politics within Multinational Corporations (MNCs), SET has been applied to unravel the complexities of power dynamics and resource exchanges.

Blau (1964) emphasized the significance of social exchanges in shaping interpersonal relationships within organisations. The application of SET to MNCs allows researchers to explore how power dynamics and political maneuvers unfold across diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Emerson (1976) expanded on SET by introducing the concept of power-dependence relations, shedding light on how individuals within MNCs may engage in political behavior to enhance their position within the power structure.

For instance, research by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2015) applied SET to the MNC context, examining how the perception of fairness in resource distribution influences employees' engagement in political behaviors. This demonstrates the adaptability of SET in understanding the intricacies of organisational politics within the unique setting of multinational enterprises.

Agency Theory

Agency Theory, developed by Jensen and Meckling (1976), provides a lens through which researchers and practitioners can understand the intricate relationships between principals and agents within organisations. The

theory originates from the notion of agency problems arising from the separation of ownership and control in corporations. In the context of Multinational Corporations (MNCs), where ownership is dispersed across various stakeholders and management is geographically distributed, Agency Theory becomes particularly relevant.

Jensen and Meckling (1976) conceptualized the principal-agent relationship as a contractual arrangement where the principal delegates decision-making authority to the agent. The inherent misalignment of interests between the principal (owners or shareholders) and the agent (management) introduces agency costs, which may manifest as opportunistic behaviors or information asymmetry.

Scholars have applied Agency Theory to MNCs to investigate how agency problems influence political behaviors and decision-making processes. For instance, research by Hitt, Ireland, and Lee (2010) delves into the challenges faced by MNCs in aligning the interests of geographically dispersed managers with those of the shareholders. The study underscores the importance of understanding how agency problems may contribute to political maneuvering within MNCs, as managers seek to balance their own interests with those of the shareholders.

In the evolving landscape of MNCs, where complexities arise from cultural differences, varying legal frameworks, and diverse stakeholder expectations, Agency Theory remains a valuable framework for comprehending the dynamics of organisational politics. Researchers continue to explore how MNCs can design governance mechanisms and incentive structures to mitigate agency problems and foster more effective decision-making in the face of political challenges.

Methodology

This study made use of the qualitative research approach to analyze trends in organizational politics and theoretical assessment of multinational enterprise. The study used literature sourced from the academic database (Osunbor & Ofobruku, 2023). This investigation started with the probing for published relevant articles in the Google Scholar and Researchgate. The academic database was searched for the feature of the keywords in order to establish the state of knowledge of the variables of the study (Abomeh et al, 2024).

This research aims to identify trends, lead authors perceptions, and scientific work in the field of organisational politics. The data utilised in this study were mainly obtained from secondary sources: journal articles from juried journals. The major strength of this study is the textual analysis of data anchored on social exchange theory and agency theory used for the interrogation of contending issues.

This review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure rigor, transparency, and reproducibility.

Eligibility Criteria

The PICOS (Population, Phenomenon of Interest, Context, Outcome, Study Design) framework was used to define eligibility:

- i Phenomenon of Interest: organizational politics and multinational enterprises , as defined by scholars.
- ii Context: Studies focused on Agency theory, communication strategies, cultural awareness leadership practices, social exchange theory.
- iii Study Design: Empirical studies (qualitative method), theoretical studies, and review articles published in English.

Study Selection Process

The initial search yielded 106 records. After removing duplicates, 81 records remained. Titles and abstracts were screened against the eligibility criteria, resulting in 40 studies for full-text review. A rigorous full-text assessment for eligibility was conducted, which excluded 14 studies that did not explicitly focus on organizational politics or provided insufficient data on the multinational context. Finally, 26 studies were deemed eligible for inclusion in the qualitative synthesis.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from the 26 studies were extracted into a standardized matrix, capturing: author(s) and year, research objectives, methodology. A thematic analysis approach was employed, following the process of (Abomeh, 2012; Omoankhanlen, et al, 2018; Abomeh, & Agbonifo, 2021). The analysis was guided by the research questions and the theories reviewed.

Findings and Conclusion

The findings of the systematic literature review on the theoretical assessment of organizational politics within the context of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) has shed light on various perspectives, strengths, and weaknesses in understanding this complex phenomenon. Through the evaluation of different theoretical frameworks, it became evident that each perspective contributes unique insights, emphasizing the importance of considering a holistic approach for a comprehensive understanding of organizational politics in MNCs.

The identification of fundamental constructs associated with organizational politics in MNCs serves as a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge. These constructs, ranging from power dynamics and influence tactics to cultural nuances and structural factors provide a nuanced view of the intricate web of interactions within multinational organizations.

Furthermore, the exploration of potential mitigating factors and interventions offers practical implications for managing and positively influencing the outcomes of organizational politics in MNCs. Recognizing the significance of leadership practices, communication strategies, and cultural awareness among other factors, highlights actionable steps that organizations can take to foster a healthier political environment.

In essence, this literature review not only enhances our understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of organizational politics in MNCs but also provides a foundation for future research and managerial practices. As multinational corporations continue to navigate the complexities of a globalized world, the insights gleaned from this review can guide efforts to create adaptive and resilient organizational structures that promote effective collaboration and minimize the detrimental effects of organizational politics. Multinational enterprises should make available in the organization flawless guidelines on ethical conduct to ensure fairness and transparency. Managers should be encouraged to adopt supportive and collaborative approaches to leadership that focus on enhancing employee morale and motivation.

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